A Mummer's Wife

by George Moore

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GEORGE MOORE

AUTHOR OF "THE CONFESSIONS OF A YOUNG MAN," "ESTHER WATERS," ETC.

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TO MY FRIEND,

JAMES DAVIS,

I DEDICATE THIS BOOK, IN ACKNOWLEDGMENT
OF A LITERARY DEBT.

"Change the surroundings in which man lives, and, in two or three generations, you will have changed his physical constitution, his habits of life, and a goodly number of his ideas."—Victor Duruy, *L'Introduction Générale à l'Histoire de France.*

A MUMMER'S WIFE

CHAPTER I

IN default of a screen, a gown and a red petticoat had been thrown over a clothes-horse, and this shaded the glare of the lamp from the eyes of the sick man. In the pale obscurity of the room, his bearded cheeks could be seen buried in a heap of tossed pillows. By his bedside sat a young woman. As she dozed, her face drooped until her features were hidden, and the lamp-light made the curious curves of a beautiful ear look like a piece of illuminated porcelain. Her hands lay upon her lap, her needlework slipped from them; as it fell to the ground, she awoke.

Pressing her hands against her forehead, she made an effort to rouse herself. As she did so, her face contracted with an expression of disgust, and she remembered the ether. The soft, vaporous odor drifted towards her from a small table strewn with medicine bottles, which stood at the foot of the iron bedstead. Arising, she passed silently across the room, and, taking care to hold the cork tightly in her fingers, so as to avoid any sound, she squeezed it firmly into the bottle. At that moment the clock struck eleven. The clear tones of its bell broke the silence sharply; the patient moaned as if in reply, and his thin hairy arms stirred feverishly on the wide patchwork counterpane. Kindly she took them in her hands and covered them over. The pillows were bowed in, beaten almost flat; she tried to arrange them more comfortably, but as she did so he turned and tossed impatiently. His forehead was moist with perspiration, but, fearing to disturb him, she put back the handkerchief she had taken from the pillow, and stood

staring vaguely into the shadows that clouded the further end of the room. Then, regaining her chair, with a weary movement, she picked up the cloth that had fallen from her knees, and slowly continued her work.

It was, like the counterpane on the bed, a piece of patchwork, and in this instance the squares of a chessboard had been taken as a design. Selecting a fragment of stuff, she trimmed it into the required shape, and with tailor-like precision stewed it into its allotted corner. For fancy work she had not much taste or time, but in the long hours she was forced to pass at her husband's bedside she strove thus to utilize the odds and ends of the shop.

Nothing was now heard but the methodical click of her needle as it struck the head of her thimble, and then the long swish of the thread as she drew it through the cloth. The lamp at her elbow burned steadily, and the glare glanced along her arm as she raised it with the large movement of sewing. Wherever the light touched it her hair was blue, and it encircled, like a piece of rich black velvet, the white but too prominent temples; a dark shadow defined the fine straight nose, hinted at a thin indecision of lips, whilst a broad touch of white marked the weak but not unbeautiful chin. On her knees lay the patchwork, with its jagged edges, and the floor at her feet was covered with innumerable scraps, making a red and black litter. On the corner of the table lay a book, a well-worn volume in a faded red paper cover. It was a novel she used to read with delight when she was a girl, and, hoping that it might help her to pass away these weary hours, she had sought for it at the bottom of an old trunk; but it had somehow failed to interest her, and after a few pages she had laid it aside, preferring for distraction her accustomed sewing. She was now well awake, and, as she worked, her thoughts turned on things concerning the daily routine of her life. She thought of the time when her husband would be well, of the pillow she was making, of how nice it would look in the green armchair, of the much greater likelihood of letting their rooms, if they were better furnished, of their new lodger, and of the probability of a quarrel between him and her mother-in-law, Mrs. Ede. So engrossed was she

in her musings that she did not notice how difficult and laboured her husband's breathing had become. He had thrown the coverlet from him, his chest heaved, and his breath came from him with a loud wheeze which momentarily thickened in sound. When at length she looked up a look of supreme pity passed across her face. Putting her work aside she approached the bed.

As she did so he opened his eyes.

"Do you feel bad, dear?" she asked in a low voice.

"Oh, yes, I do. I'm suffocating; lift me up. I'm going to have a fit; I hope it won't be a bad one."

Placing her arms round him she helped him into a sitting position, and then propped up the pillows, so as to form a support for his back. She also took a small red shawl from her shoulders and pinned it round his. Nothing more could then be done but to wait and see how the attack would proceed. Gathering his legs under him he leaned forward snorting like a wounded animal. His face was emaciated, and his dark thick hair fell over his forehead in sticky masses. From time to time he attempted to cough, but his breath ran short in his throat, and the efforts seemed to exhaust him. At times he had not the strength to separate the saliva from his lips, but as he got rid of the phlegm that oppressed him he appeared to grow a little better, and signed to Kate to remove the basin. She felt no disgust, but only a noble desire to relieve his sufferings. Presently he spoke, and in a deep and husky voice said—

"Oh, what I have done to merit such suffering? And it is all the fault of that cursed actor; I wish I had never heard his name."

"Hush, hush," said Kate, trying to soothe him. "He won't interfere with you, and it will bring us a connection which will enable us to keep our rooms always let."

For more than a week past the new lodger had formed the staple subject of conversation in this household. Mrs. Ede, Kate's mother-in-law, was loud in her protestations that the harboring of an actor could not but be attended by bad luck. Kate, whose Puritanism was of a less marked kind, only felt a little uneasy. She had inherited the vague

distrust of her class against all that was itinerant; otherwise she was quite unprejudiced. Perhaps at first she had felt inclined to agree with her mother-in-law, but her husband had shown himself so stubborn, and had so persistently declared he was not going to keep his rooms empty any longer, that for peace sake she was fain to side with him. The question had arisen in a very unexpected way. During the whole winter they had been unfortunate with their rooms; they had made many attempts to get lodgers, had even advertised. Some few people had asked to see the rooms, but they merely made an offer. One day, however, a man who had come into the shop to buy some paper collars asked Kate if she had any apartments to let. On her replying that she had, they went upstairs, and after a cursory inspection he told her that he was the agent in advance to a travelling opera company, and that if she liked he would recommend her rooms to the stage manager—a particular friend of his. The proposition was somewhat startling, but not liking to say no she proposed to refer the matter to her husband.

At the particular moment Mr. Ede happened to be engaged in a violent dispute with his mother, and so angry was he that when Mrs. Ede raised her hands to protest against the introduction of an actor into the household, he straightway told her that, "If she did not like it she might do the other thing." Nothing more was said for the present; the old lady retired in indignation, and Mr. Lennox was written to. Kate sympathized alternately with both sides. Mrs. Ede was sturdy in defence of her principles; Mr. Ede was petulant and abusive; and between the two Kate was blown about like a feather in a storm. Daily the argument waxed warmer until one night, in the middle of a scene characterised by much biblical quotation, Mr. Ede declared he could stand it no longer, and rushed out of the house. In vain the women tried to stop him, knowing well what the consequences would be. A draught, a slight exposure, amply sufficed to give him a cold, and with him a cold always ended in an asthmatic attack. And these were often so violent as to lay him up for weeks at a time. In the present instance the result was as foreseen. When

Mr. Ede, his temper grown cooler under the influence of the night air, returned, he was coughing, and the next night found him breathless. His anger had at first vented itself against his mother, whom he refused to see, and thus the whole labor of nursing him was thrown on Kate. She did not grumble at this, but it was terrible to have to listen to him.

It was Mr. Lennox, and nothing but Mr. Lennox. All the pauses in the suffocation were utilized to speak on this important question, and even now Kate, who had not yet perceived that the short respite which the getting rid of the phlegm had given him was coming to an end, expected him to say something concerning the still unknown person. But Mr. Ede did not speak, and, to put herself as it were out of suspense, she said, referring to some previous conversation—

"I am sure you are right; the only people in the town who let their rooms are those who have a theatrical connection."

"Oh, I don't care, I'm going to have a bad night," said Mr. Ede, who now thought only of how he should get his next breath.

"But you seemed to be getting better," she replied hurriedly.

"Oh! oh! I feel it coming on—I am suffocating. Have you got the ether?"

Without answering, Kate made a rapid movement towards the table. Snatching the bottle she uncorked it. The sickly odor quietly spread like oil over the close atmosphere of the room; it made her feel sick, but, mastering her repugnance, she held it to him, and, in the hope of obtaining relief, he inhaled it greedily. But the remedy proved of no avail, and he pushed the bottle away.

"Oh, these headaches! My head is splitting," he said, after a deep inspiration which seemed as if it would cost him his life. "Nothing seems to do me any good. Have you got some of those cigarettes?"

"I am sorry to say they have not arrived yet. I wrote for them," she replied, hesitating; "but do you not think—?"

Shaking his head, and resenting Kate's assiduities, with trembling fingers he unfastened the shawl she had placed on his shoulders. He did this in order to have his chest entirely free. Then planting his elbows on his knees, with a fixed head and elevated shoulders, he gave himself up to the struggle of taking breath.

Kate watched him, and at that moment she would have laid down her life to save him from the least of his pains. But it was agony to sit by him, listening to the terrible sobbing, and to know that nothing could be done to relieve him. There he lay before her, helpless in his suffering, moaning piteously.

She had seen the same scene repeated a hundred times before, but it never seemed to lose any of its horror. In the first month of her marriage she had been frightened almost out of her life by one of these asthmatic attacks. It had come on in the middle of the night, and she remembered well how she had prayed to God that it should not be her fate to see her husband die at her very feet, and in such agony. Now she knew that death was not to be apprehended, and that the paroxysm would wear itself out, but she knew also of the horrors that would have to be endured before the time of relief came. She could count them upon her fingers—she could see it all as in a vision—a ghostly nightmare that would drag out its long changes until the dawn began to break. Heaving a deep sigh as she anticipated the hours of the night, she laid her hand yearningly on her husband's. It was cold as lead, and he was wet with perspiration.

"Air—air! I'm suff—o—cating!" he sobbed out with a desperate effort.

Kate ran to the door and threw it open. The paroxysm had now reached its height. Resting his elbows well on his knees he gasped many times, but before the inspiration was complete his strength failed him. So exhausted was he that no want but that of breath could have forced him to try again; and the second effort was even more terrible than the first. A great upheaval, a great wrenching and rocking, seemed to be going on within him; the veins on his forehead were distended, the muscles of his chest labored,

and every minute seemed as if it were going to be his last. However, with a supreme effort, he managed to breathe, and then there was a moment of respite, the infinitesimal pause before the process of expiration began. This, although painful, did not seem to distress him to the same extent as the inspiration. But he was obviously thinking of the next struggle, for he breathed avariciously, letting the air that had cost him so much agony pass slowly through his lips.

At this point of the attack it is impossible for the patient to remain lying down, and as if by instinct, divining that in his present position another inspiration was out of the question, he slipped out of bed and attempted to gain the window.

A very ghastly scene then followed. Unable to proceed farther than the table where she was in the habit of sitting, he stopped and placed his hands upon it. So engrossed was he in the labor of breathing that he pushed the paraffin lamp roughly, and it would have fallen had Kate not been there to catch it. She besought of him to say what he wanted, but he made no reply, and continued to drag himself from one piece of furniture to another. Grasping the back of a chair, with his head thrown back and his shoulders raised to the level of his ears, he breathed by jerks, each inspiration being accompanied by a violent spasmodic wrench, violent enough it seemed to break open his chest. The agony he appeared to be in was appalling. Often she had seen him suffer until she thought she would go mad with mingled fear and pity; but in the present attack there was something unnatural, something that no constitution could endure for long.

Tremblingly, with apprehension, she watched, afraid to leave him, expecting every moment to see him roll over a corpse. Wildly she asked herself what she was to do, for it seemed to her impossible that it could be her only duty to stand by him, helplessly wiping away the great drops of perspiration which dripped down his face and glistened at the end of his beard.

But he had forbidden her ever to send for a doctor, ever to leave him, and for the last five years she had heard that there was no real remedy, as there was no real danger, and

that the only thing to do was to wait patiently until the time of relief came. Kate remembered all this, and she strove to reconcile herself to the task of watching these remorseless pantings. She strove to pray, but she could not abstract her thoughts from the piteous object before her. And he was a piteous object. A long pallid face crushed under a shock of dark matted hair, a dirty night-dress draggling round a pair of thin legs, was the meagre reality; but for the moment the grandeur of human suffering covered him, lifted him beyond the pale of loving or loathing, and invested and clothed him in the pity of tragic things. The room, too, seemed transfigured. The bare wide floor, the gaunt bed, the poor walls plastered with religious prints cut from journals, even the ordinary furniture of everyday use—the little washhand-stand with the common delf ewer, the chest of drawers that might have been bought for thirty shillings—lost their coarseness; their triviality disappeared, until nothing was seen or felt but this one suffering man.

The minutes went, slipping like the iron teeth of a saw over Kate's sensibilities. A hundred times she had run over in her mind the list of remedies she had seen him use. They were few in number, and none of any real service except the cigarettes which she had not. Piteously she asked him to allow her to try iodine, but he could not or would not make her any answer. With his nightshirt torn open, grasping the back of a chair, he stood rigid and terrible as a picture of Pain by Michael Angelo.

The atmosphere of the room was close and dusty, and bitter with the smell of medicine. Kate had thought of opening the window, but had not done so for fear of giving him cold; but he now moved towards it of his own accord. It was cruel to see him struggling, but he resisted any assistance, and alone reached the toilet-table. There, however, he had to stop, and watching like one in a dream, penetrated with her own powerlessness to save or avert, Kate remained crouching by the fireplace without strength to think or act, until she was suddenly awakened by seeing him relax his hold and slip heavily on the floor.

Instantly rushing towards him and stepping over the

body, she tore aside the curtains, raised the sash, and let the cool air into the room. She had then to lift him from the ground.

By putting forth her whole strength she could get him into a sitting position, but when she attempted to place him in a chair he slipped through her arms. There was, therefore, nothing to do but to shriek for help, and hope to awaken her morther-in-law. The echoes rang through the house, and as they died away, appalled she listened to the silence. At length it grew clear that Mrs. Ede could not be awakened, and Kate saw that she would have to trust to herself alone.

Entwining both arms round the body, she endeavoured to lift him, but as before, when she got him nearly to the height of a chair, her strength was exhausted, and she was obliged to lay him back again on the floor. After two or three failures she determined to restore him to consciousness before attempting to move him. Placing a pillow under his head, she sprinkled his face with cold water, and in a few minutes was rewarded by seeing him open his eyes.

But it was only for a moment; after one little stare he slipped back into insensibility, and this was repeated several times. Kate, however, redoubled her efforts, and at last Ralph recovered himself permanently, and she was enabled to place him in a chair. Pale and chill, he sat there striving and struggling with his breath, unable to move, and soaked with perspiration. Then she buttoned his nightshirt across his poor panting chest, and covered his shoulders with the red shawl. He submitted like a child, and it was with a thrill of pleasure that she noticed how the roaring of his breath seemed to soften in sound.

The night was soft, and a cool breeze blew over the housetops refreshingly in their faces. The danger of his catching cold again was very great, but as he would not consent to return to bed, she could do no more than cover him up as well and warmly as possible. For this purpose she fetched a blanket from her bed in the next room, wrapped it firmly round and tucked it under his legs. He then appeared to be pretty comfortable and, although still unable to speak, sat quietly in his chair. With a sentiment of real

tenderness she took his hand in hers, and as she looked at him she felt her heart grow larger.

It was one of those simple and ardent emotions that spring from the human heart like flowers from the earth. Sitting by him she felt quite glad, and her eyes grew soft with the happiness that welled, bright like a spring of pure water, up through her mind. He was her husband; he had suffered terribly, and was now getting better; and she was his wife, whose duty it was to attend him. She only wished he would allow her to love him a little better. But against her will, facts pierced through this luminous mist of sentiment, and she could not help remembering how petulant he was with her, how utterly all her wishes were disregarded. "What a pity he is not a little different," she thought; and certain romantic recollections flashed across her faintly and dimly, for they were too far distant to be clear, the time was too pressing for them to endure, and when she looked at him and saw how he suffered, all other thoughts were once more drowned and swept away. She forgot how he often rendered her life miserable, well nigh unbearable, by small vices, faults that defy definition, unending selfishness and unceasing irritability. But now all dissatisfaction and bitternesses were again merged into a sentiment that was akin to love; and in this time of physical degradation he possessed her perhaps more truly, more perfectly, than even in his best moments of health.

But her life was one of work, not of musing, and there was plenty for her to attend to. Ralph would certainly not be able to leave his chair for some time yet; she had wrapped him up comfortably in a blanket, she could do no more, and whilst he was gradually recovering it would be as well to tidy up the room a bit. There were slops to empty, and he would never be able to sleep in a bed that he had been lying in all day.

This was important, for he generally got a little ease towards morning, particularly after a bad attack. So, hoping that the present occasion would not prove an exception, Kate set to work to make the bed. Resolving to do this thoroughly, she turned the mattress over, beating it and shaking it with all her force. She did the same with the

pillows, and fearing that there might be a few crumbs sticking to the sheets, she shook them out several times.

When the last crease had been carefully smoothed away she went back to her husband. In reply to her many questions he only motioned her to shut the window, and so impatiently that she feared he would reproach her for having left it open so long.

Mr. Ede, although he could not yet speak or even breathe without much discomfort, was obviously better. The violence of the paroxysm had passed, and he eventually allowed her to lead him back to bed. There she overwhelmed him with little attentions. She insisted on being allowed to paint his back with iodine, although he did not believe in the remedy; and on his saying he was thirsty she went groping down the narrow stairs to the kitchen, hunted for the matches in the dark, lighted a spirit-lamp, and made him a hot drink.

He drank it, however, without a word or look of thoughtfulness, and she felt a little disappointed.

These duties of the sickroom were followed by the dreariness of a long vigil. She was now wholly tired. Whilst she had anything to do she could bear up; but to sit silently watching through half-closed eyelids the clouded outline of a stooping figure in the shadow of the bed, watching with aching eyes the red glimmer of the lamp with its solitary round of light above it on the darkened ceiling, and listening with frightened ears to the long wheezing of the asthmatic, was a terrible ordeal.

She had had very little sleep for the last two nights, and for the present she saw no prospect of being able to leave him. He did not seem to grow better.

For some time she had not noticed any change in his appearance. Now and again he would lie down, but he soon began to choke, and the necessity of breathing would force him into a sitting position. And even when there came to him a short moment of respite, he only used it to bemoan his evil fortune. Leaning over the side of the bed, in an agonizing voice he would murmur—

"Oh, will this ever end? Why did you leave that window open so long? I am sure it has made me worse."

These complainings wounded Kate's feelings, and the transient glow of tenderness she had felt for him was now lost in an utter sense of lassitude. Her thoughts slipped and faded into a dreamy confusion, and in her ears his asthmatic breathing throbbed like the sound of distant falling waters. Sometimes the noise would awake her, and when she opened her eyes she would look at him, fearing vaguely that he would reproach her with neglect. But a glance sufficed to reassure her on this point. In his usual position, with his elbows on his knees, and an expression of extreme distress on his face, he labored for breath, quite unconscious of what was passing around him. Seeing this, she would lie back to be blinded again by the soft veils of forgetfulness in whose folds she felt herself drifting away. A great blurred heavy thought, that she would awake to find her husband a corpse, oppressed her; she reasoned with it obtusely, until the last shadow of sleep fell upon her.

How long she slept she could not say, but suddenly she was awakened by her husband's voice calling to her peevishly. She looked up abruptly and seeing what had happened, said—

"Oh, I am sorry, Ralph, but I could not help it. I was so very tired—"

Mr. Ede was lying down, and the dreadful dyspnœa was now confined to a low wheezing. He had been looking at his wife for some time, but as the remembrance of what he had suffered pierced through his thoughts the expression of his face changed. He had at first hesitated before awakening her, but as the door had been left open he fancied he felt a draught; he could not resist the temptation of hearing what she would have to say in defense of her conduct.

"Do I want anything?" he said, "there is the door wide open, and I might have died for anything you would have known or cared."

This unmerited reproof brought color to Kate's face. She walked across the room without a word and shut the door, but as she came back to her place she said—

"I do not know how you can speak to me so ungratefully."

"Prop me up; if I lie so low I shall get bad again. I wish you had a touch of this asthma yourself, and you would know then what it is to be left alone for several hours."

Frightened at this accusation, Kate looked at the clock, and saw she had been asleep a little more than half an hour. But without contradicting him she arranged the pillows and settled the blankets up under his chin. Then thinking it would perhaps be advisable to say something, she congratulated him on seeming so much better.

"Better! If I am better it is no thanks to you," he said. "You must have been mad to have left the window open so long."

"You wanted it open; you know very well that when you are very bad like that you must have change of air. The room was so close."

"Yes, but that is no reason for leaving it open half an hour."

"I offered to shut it and you wouldn't let me."

"I daresay you are sick of nursing me, and would like to get rid of me. The window was not a bad dodge."

Kate remained silent, being too indignant for the moment to think of replying; but it was evident from her manner that she would not be able to contain herself much longer. He had hurt her to the quick, and her brown eyes swam with tears. He, with his head laid back upon the built-up pillows, fumed slowly, trying to find new matter for reproach, and breath wherewith to explain it. At last he thought of the cigarettes.

"Even supposing that you did not remember how long you left the window open, I cannot understand how you forgot to send for the cigarettes. You know well enough that it is the only thing that relieves me when I am in this state. I think it was most unfeeling—yes, most unfeeling!" Having said so much he leaned forward to get breath, and coughed.

"You had better lie still, Ralph; you will only make

yourself bad again. Now that you feel a little easier you should try to go to sleep."

So far she got without betraying any emotion, but as she continued to advise him her voice began to tremble, her presence of mind to forsake her, and she burst into a flood of tears.

"I don't know how you can treat me as you do," she said, sobbing hysterically. "I do everything—I give up my night's rest to you, I work hard all day for you, and in return I only receive hard words. Oh! it is no use," she said, "I can bear it no longer; you will have to get some one else to mind you."

This outburst of passion came suddenly upon Mr. Ede, and for some time he was at a loss how to proceed. At last, feeling a little sorry, he resolved to make it up, and putting out his hand to her he said—

"Now, don't cry, Kate; perhaps I was wrong in speaking so crossly. I didn't mean all I said—it is this horrid asthma."

"Oh! I can bear anything but to be told I neglect you —and when I stop up watching you three nights running—"

These little quarrels were of constant occurrence. Irritable by nature, and rendered doubly so by the character of his complaint, the invalid at times found it impossible to restrain his ill-humor; but he was not entirely bad; he had inherited a touch of kindheartedness from his mother, and being now moved by Kate's tears he said—

"That's quite true, and I'm sorry for what I said; you are a good little nurse. I won't scold you again. Make it up."

But Kate found it hard to forget merely because Ralph desired it, and for some time she refused to listen to his expostulations, and walked about the room crying.

But her anger could not long resist the dead weight of sleep that was oppressing her, and eventually she came and sat down in her old place by him. The next step to reconciliation was more easy. Kate, although quick-tempered, was not vindictive, and at last, amid some hysterical sobbing, peace was restored. Then Mr. Ede drifted into speak-

ing of his asthma. He told her how he had really fancied he was going to die, and when she expressed her fear and regret he hastened to assure her that no one had ever died of asthma—that a man might live fifty, sixty, or seventy years, suffering all the while from the complaint. It did you no harm; it was merely something awful. In this way he rambled on until words and ideas together failed him, and he fell asleep. With a sigh of relief Kate rose to her feet, and seeing that he was settled for the night she turned to leave him, and passed into her room with a slow and dragging movement. But the place had a look so cold and unrestful that it pierced through even her sense of weariness. For a moment she stood trying to urge her tired brains to think of what she should do. At last, remembering that she could get a pillow from the room they reserved for letting, she turned to go.

Facing their room, and only divided by the very narrowest of passages, was the stranger's apartment.

Both doors were approached by a couple of steps, which so reduced the space that were two people to meet on the landing one would have to give way to the other. Mr. and Mrs. Ede found this proximity to their lodger, when they had one, somewhat inconvenient, but, as he said—

"One didn't get ten shillings a week for nothing."

Kate lingered a moment on the threshold, and then, with the hand in which she held the novel she had been reading, she picked up her skirt and stepped across the way.

CHAPTER II

FOR the next few hours Kate lay buried in a dull, deep sleep. The steam tramways had been whistling for an hour or more, but they did not awake her, and it was not until nine o'clock that she became conscious that a dark figure was passing through the twilight of the room. At first she could not determine who it was, but as the blinds were suddenly drawn up and a flood of sunlight poured across the bed, she fell back amid the pillows, having recognized her mother-in-law in a painful moment of semi-blindness. The old woman carried a slop-pail, which she nearly dropped, so surprised was she to find Kate in the stranger's room.

"But how did you get here?" she said hastily.

"Oh, I had to give Ralph my pillow, and when he went to sleep I came to fetch one out of the bed-room here; and then I thought I would be more comfortable here—I was too tired to go back again—I don't know how it was—what does it matter?"

Kate, who was stupefied with sleep, had answered so crossly that Mrs. Ede did not speak for some time; at last, at the end of a long silence, she said—

"Then he had a very bad night?"

"Dreadful!" returned Kate. "I never was so much frightened in my life."

"And how did the fit come on?" asked Mrs. Ede, deeply interested.

"Oh, I can't tell you now," said Kate. "I am so tired. I am aching all over."

"Well, then, I will bring you up your breakfast. And you do look tired! It will do you good to remain in bed."

"Bring me up my breakfast! Then, what time is it?" said Kate sitting up in bed with a start.

"What does it matter what the time is? If you are tired, lie still; I'll see that everything is right."

"But I have promised Mrs. Barnes her dress by to-morrow night. Oh, my goodness! I shall never get it done. Do tell me what time it is?"

"Well, it is just nine," the old woman answered apologetically; "but Mrs. Barnes will have to wait; you can't kill yourself. It is a great shame of Ralph to have you sitting up when I could look after him just as well, and all because of that horrid man."

"Oh, don't, mother," said Kate, who knew that on that subject Mrs. Ede could speak for a good half-hour; and remembering all that had been endured for the sake of the letting of their rooms, she took the old woman's coarse hands in hers, and looking earnestly in her face, said—

"You know, mother, I have a hard time of it, and I try to bear up as well as I can. You are the only person I have to help me. Well, don't you turn against me. Ralph has set his mind on having the rooms let. Mr. Lennox is coming here to-day; it is all settled. Will you promise me not to do anything to unsettle it? Ralph will be so angry if Mr. Lennox is not satisfied, and when he is angry you know how miserable it makes us all. While Mr. Lennox is here, will you try to make him comfortable? A great deal depends on you, for I have my dressmaking to attend to, and I cannot be always after him. Now will you do this thing for me?"

They were the greatest friends, and Kate often thought that if she had not this steadfast, kind-hearted woman to lean on that she would never be able to bear up against the hardships of her life; and in her turn Mrs. Ede loved her daughter-in-law dearly, perhaps better even than she did her own son. This working woman's principles were as strong as they were narrow, and her sorrow arose with a gulp in her throat as she listened to Kate's request. She had already opposed by every means in her power the letting of the rooms to actors, and had tolerably well satisfied her conscience by so doing. But her position in this household, although strong (she had an annuity of thirty pounds a year), was not impregnable, and she felt that it would perhaps be better to give way rather than risk a definite family rupture. Still she found it very hard when the time

came to make a formal surrender. Kate's entreaties were, however, difficult to resist, and after a moment or so of indecision she said—

"I do not believe that money made out of such people can bring anyone any luck, but since you all wish it, I suppose I must give way. But you won't be able to say I didn't warn you."

"Yes, yes, I know you did," replied Kate; "but will you promise not to be disagreeable to him? Since we cannot prevent his coming, will you promise that whilst he is here you will attend to him just as you did to the other gentleman?"

After some hesitation, she said: "I shall say nothing to him, and if he doesn't make the house a disgrace, I shall be well satisfied."

"How do you mean a disgrace?"

"Don't you know, my dear, that actors have always a lot of women after them, and I for one am not going to attend on wenches like them. If I had my way I'd whip such people until I slashed all the wickedness out of them."

"But he won't bring any women here; we won't allow it," said Kate, a little shocked, and she strove to think how they should put a stop to such behavior. "If Mr. Lennox does not conduct himself properly——"

"Of course, I shall try to do my duty, and if Mr. Lennox respects himself I shall try to respect him."

Mrs. Ede spoke these words very hesitatingly, but the admission that she possibly might respect Mr. Lennox satisfied Kate, and not wishing to press the matter further, she said, suddenly referring to their previous conversation:

"But didn't you say that it was nine o'clock?"

"It is more than nine now."

"Oh Lord, oh Lord! how late I am! I suppose the two little girls are here?"

"They arrived just as I was coming upstairs, but I set them to work."

"I wish you'd get the tea ready, and you might make some buttered toast; Ralph would like some, and so should I, for the matter of that."

Then Mr. Ede's voice was heard calling, and, without

waiting for an answer, Kate hurried to him. When she entered he had his back turned to her, and was endeavoring to settle himself. Seeing what was wanted, she hastened to his assistance.

"Where were you last night?" he asked, after a pause.

"I slept in the stranger's room; I thought you would not require me. I was more comfortable there. The bed in the back room is scarcely bearable."

He did not answer at once, but continued to breathe heavily in a way that made her fear he was going to have another attack.

Kate looked at him earnestly. Although she had never loved him, his utter dependence upon her had endeared him to her. She had known nobody else; other men had only passed before her like phantoms; of him at least she had a distinct knowledge, and had he been a little kinder he would have satisfied her. Her dreams did not fly high, and now as she sat by him, holding his clammy hand, she thought she would have felt happy were she sure of even so much affection. A little love would have made her life so much pleasanter. It did not matter who gave it; she sighed for a little, ever so little.

"Is mother in a great rage because I won't let her in?" he said presently.

"She is very much cut up about it, dear; you know she loves you better than anyone in the world. You would do well to make it up with her."

"Well, perhaps I was wrong," he said after a time, and with good humor, "but she annoys me so dreadfully. She will interfere in everything; as if I hadn't a right to let my rooms to whom I pleased. Of course she pays for all she has here, but I would much sooner she left us than be lorded over in that way."

"She does not want to lord it over you, dear. It is all arranged. She promised me just now she would say nothing more about it; indeed she promised she would be quite agreeable to Mr. Lennox."

At this announcement of submission to his will the invalid smiled cheerfully. He declared he was right; he was sure Mr. Lennox would turn out very well; that the only

thing he regretted was the trouble an extra person in the house would give his wife and mother.

"But I shall soon be well," he said, with a faint show of irony. "I fancy the worst is over now, and I daresay I shall be downstairs looking after the shop in a week, and that will take a lot off your hands."

Against such imprudence Kate protested. She declared that they could get on without him, owing, she was careful to add, so as not to offend his vanity, to the terrible slackness of business. This led to a small conversation concerning the state of trade, and then Kate suggested that she should go and see after his breakfast. Mr. Ede had no objection to offer, so bidding him good-bye for the moment she went downstairs. When she entered the front kitchen she found Annie assisting Mrs. Ede to make the toast. Lizzie stood at the table buttering it and piling it upon a plate. As it was against Kate's theories that apprentices should assist in the household work, the two brown-haired little girls drew their chairs to the table under the window and commenced sewing; Kate and Mrs. Ede coming to and from the kitchen arranged the table for breakfast. When all was ready Mrs. Ede remembered that she had to make her peace with her son, and, seizing the tray, she went upstairs.

While she was away Kate sat down wearily on the red calico-covered sofa. Like an elongated arm-chair, it looked quaint, neat, and dumpty, pushed up against the wall between the black fireplace on the right and the little window shaded with the muslin blinds, under which a pot of greenstuff bloomed freshly. Overpowered by the labor and excitement of the night, Kate lay back thinking vaguely. Her cup of hot tea was uppermost in her mind, and she hoped that Mrs. Ede would not keep her long waiting. Then as her thoughts detached themselves, she remembered the actor whom they expected that afternoon. The annoyances which he had unconsciously caused her had linked him to her in a curious way, and in the sensation of nearness that each succeeding hour magnified, all her prejudices vanished, and she wondered who this being was who, even before she had seen him, had brought so much trouble into

her life. As the word trouble went through her mind she paused, arrested by a passing feeling of sentimentality; but it explained nothing, defined nothing, only touched her as a breeze does a flower, and floated away. The dreamy warmth of the fire absorbed her more direct feelings, and for some moments she dozed in a haze of dim sensuousness and emotive numbness. As in a dusky glass she saw herself a tender, loving, but unhappy woman; by her side were her querulous husband and her kind-minded mother-in-law, and then there was a phantom she could not determine, and behind it something into which she could not see. Was it a distant country?—was it a scene of revelry? Impossible to say, for whenever she attempted to find definite shapes in the glowing colors, they vanished in a blurred confusion.

But amid these fleeting visions there was one shape that particularly interested her, and she pursued it tenaciously, until in a desperate effort to define its features she awoke with a start; and, disappointed to find she had been dreaming, she spoke more crossly than she intended to the little girls, who had pulled aside the curtain and were intently examining the huge theatrical poster which adorned the corner of the lane. But as she scolded she could not help smiling, for she saw how her dream had been made out of the red and blue dresses of the picture.

The arrival of each new company in the town was announced pictorially on this corner wall, and, in the course of the year, pretty well all the vicissitudes to which human life is liable received an ample illustration there. One week showed wrecks at sea, robberies on the highways, prisoners perishing in dungeons; and these terrible events were interlarded with green lanes and lovers, babies, glowing hearths, and heroic young husbands. The opera companies were, however, more frivolously inclined. Their pictures were concerned only with crowds of strangely dressed people and gallants kissing their hands to ladies standing on balconies.

In the pauses of their work the little girls examined these pictures and commented on them; and on Saturdays it was a matter of the keenest speculation what the following

week would bring them. Lizzie preferred exciting scenes of murder and arson, while Annie was moved more by passionate pleadings, leavetakings, and declarations of unalterable affection. These differences of taste often gave rise to little bickerings, and last week there had been much prophesying as to whether the tragic or the sentimental element would prove the staple ingredient of next week's illustrations. Lizzie had voted for robbers and mountains, Annie for lovers and a nice cottage. And, remembering their little dispute, Kate, who from the sofa could only see some violet and green dresses, said:

"Well, dears, is it a robber or a sweetheart?"

"We are not sure," exclaimed both children in a disappointed tone of voice; "we can't make the picture out." Then Lizzie, who cared little for uncertainties, said:

"It isn't a nice picture at all; it is all mixed up."

"Not a nice picture at all, and all mixed up?" said Kate, smiling, yet interested in the conversation. "And all mixed up; how is that? I must see if I can make it out myself."

The huge poster contained some figures nearly life-size. It showed a young girl in a bridal dress and wreath struggling between two police agents who had arrested her in a market place of old time, in a strangely costumed crowd, who were clamoring violently. The poor bridegroom was being held back by his friends; a handsome young man in knee breeches and a cocked hat watched the proceedings cynically in the right-hand corner, whilst on the left a big fat man frantically endeavored to recover his wig, which had been lost in the mêlée. This glaring advertisement was headed "Morton and Cox's Operatic Company," and concluded with the announcement that *Madame Angot* would be played at the Queen's Theatre, Hanley. After a few moments spent in examining the picture, which puzzled her quite as much as it did the children, Kate suggested that it must have something to do with France.

"Angot isn't an English name, and the dresses look French."

This explanation rendered the children thoughtful; but although they willingly admitted that the unintelligibility

of the picture was fully accounted for by the fact that it was a French one, they did not seem to grow less anxious to solve the riddle.

"I know what it means," cried Lizzie, who had in the meanwhile been thinking how the picture could be explained into signifying a scene of atrocious cruelty; "you see that old chap on the right? Well, he is a rich man who has sent the two policemen to carry the bride to his castle, and it is the young fellow in the corner who has betrayed them."

The ingenuity of this explanation took Kate and Annie so much by surprise that for the moment they could not attempt to controvert it, and remained silent whilst Lizzie looked at them triumphantly. The more they examined the picture the more clear did it appear that Lizzie was right. At the end of a long pause Kate said—

"Anyhow, we shall soon know, for one of the actors of the company is coming here to lodge, and we will ask him."

"A real actor coming here to lodge?" exclaimed Annie. "Oh, how nice that will be! And will he take us to see the play?"

"How silly of you, Annie," said Lizzie, who, proud of her successful explanation of the poster, was a little inclined to think she knew all about actors. "How can he take us to the play? Isn't he going to act it himself? But do tell me, Mrs. Ede, is he the one in the cocked hat?"

"I hope at all events he isn't the fat man who has lost his wig," said Annie, looking mournfully at her elder sister.

"I don't know which of those gentlemen is coming here. For all I know it may the policeman," Kate added maliciously.

"Oh, Mrs. Ede, I hope not!" exclaimed Annie and Lizzie with one accord.

Kate smiled at the children's earnestness, and wishing to keep up the joke, said—

"You know, my dear, they are only sham policemen, and are, I daresay, very nice gentlemen in reality."

Annie and Lizzie hung down their heads; it was evident they had no sympathies with policemen, not even with sham ones.

"But if it isn't a policeman, who would you like it to be, Lizzie?" said Kate.

"Oh, the man in the cocked hat," replied Lizzie without hesitation.

"And you, Annie?"

Annie looked puzzled, and after a moment said, with a slight whimper—

"Lizzie always takes what I want——. I was just going ——"

"Oh yes, miss, we know all about that," returned Lizzie derisively. "Annie never can choose for herself, she always tries to imitate me. She'll have the man who's lost his wig! Oh yes, yes! isn't it so, Mrs. Ede? Isn't Annie going to marry the man who's lost his wig?"

Annie's eyelids trembled with tears at these bitter sallies, but as she happened at that moment to catch sight of the young man in white, she declared triumphantly that she would choose him.

"Well done, Annie," said Kate laughing as she patted the child's curls, but in so doing her eyes fell on the neglected apron, and seeing how crookedly it was being hemmed she said reprovingly—

"Oh, my dear, this is very bad; you must go back, undo all you have done this morning, and get it quite straight."

Bending over the table she undid some three or four inches of the sewing, and then showed the child how the hem was to be turned in. She did this methodically, all the while thinking of what had just been said. A smile moved round the corners of her thin lips; it amused her to wonder which of these men was coming to lodge at her house. At this moment Mrs. Ede arrived upon the scene; she entered expostulating, but Kate could only catch the words "waiting" and "breakfast cold" and "sorry." The little girls, who lived in a constant state of awe of the old lady, returned to their work. The two women sat down to breakfast.

"How could you," exclaimed Mrs. Ede, "think of leaving the window open so long? He might have caught his death. He says he was very bad last night."

"Oh, dreadful," said Kate. "I never was so frightened

in all my life; I called and called for you, but nothing would awake you."

This charge of sleepyheadedness seemed to discountenance her, but to hold her tongue was an impossibility, and during breakfast she jerked out comments on things in general and the actor in particular. She hoped that he wouldn't give them much trouble; above all that he wouldn't keep late hours, and she questioned Kate minutely as to what was going to be done regarding the latch key. She referred also to the evils of bad company, and trusted that because they had an actor in the house that that wouldn't be a reason for frequenting the theatre and falling into idle habits. Then the conversation turned on Miss Hender, Kate's assistant. This young woman was one of Mrs. Ede's particular dislikes. Of her moral character she had the gravest doubts, for what could be expected of a person who turned up her nose when she was asked to stay and attend evening prayers, and who kept company with a stage carpenter?

She did not cease talking until Miss Hender entered. There were then many apologies for being an hour behind time, but she really could not help it. Her sister had been very ill, and she had been obliged to sit up with her all night. Mrs. Ede smiled at this explanation, and withdrew into the shop, leaving Miss Hender to gaze after her in scorn. Kate doubted the truth of the excuse put forward by her assistant, but she said nothing, and the conversation shortly after turned on the aprons the little girls were making. She explained that she had bought a dozen of a traveller who had called upon her, and she had sold two yesterday and three the day before, so she thought she could not do better than cut out a few more after the same pattern.

"I quite agree with you, ma'am," replied Miss Hender smartly, "they are quite pretty, nice, and tasty, without being common."

Miss Hender tried hard to think what else she could say that would delay, were it only for a few minutes, the inevitable going up to the workroom. Kate herself felt lazy; it was too soon after breakfast, but she remembered that

Mrs. Barnes's dress had been promised for Tuesday morning, and, awakening from her reverie with a start, she said—

"Come, we are wasting all the morning; we must get on with Mrs. Barnes's dress." They went upstairs.

Miss Hender was a stout, buxom, carotty-haired girl of twenty, who worked solely in order to have money to spend when she went out to enjoy herself with the stage carpenter. She was always full of information concerning things theatrical, and she considered it an unfortunate circumstance that her employer took so little interest in the big red house in Queen Street. Such funny things were continually happening there, and she was sure that the hours in the workroom would not seem half so long if Kate would wake up a bit, go to the play, and chat about what was going on in the town. It seemed incredible to Miss Hender that anyone could exist who did not go to the theatre above twice in the year. Besides, there was that horrid old woman always hanging about, with religion and salvation. It made her (Miss Hender) feel sick. She hadn't time for such things, and as for Bill, he said it was all "Tommy rot." Beyond these excellent reasons for disliking Mrs. Ede, she suspected that "the hag," as she called her, had tried to get her dismissed. This conviction afforded Miss Hender much satisfaction, and when she had heard that there was a question of admitting an actor into the house as a lodger, she had not failed to suggest that no one in the town could hope to keep their rooms let except through a theatrical connection.

Miss Hender, although a lazy and dissolute girl, was an excellent workwoman, and seeing from Kate's manner that the time had not come for conversation, she applied herself diligently to her business.

Placing the two side-seams and the back under the needle, she gave the wheel a turn, and then worked the machine with her feet. Rapidly the little steel needle darted up and down into the glistening silk, which Miss Hender's thick hands pushed methodically forward. The work was too delicate to admit of any distraction, so for some time nothing was heard but the clinking rattle of the machine

and the "swishing" of the silk as Kate drew it across the table and snipped it with the scissors which hung from her waist.

But at the end of about half an hour the work came to a pause. Miss Hender had finished sewing up the body and had tacked on the facings. Kate had cut out the skirt and basted it together. The time, therefore, had arrived for interchanging a few words. Her promise to Mrs. Barnes had been the subject of her thoughts. Lifting her head from her work, she asked Miss Hender if she could remain that evening and do a little overtime. Miss Hender said she was very sorry, but it was the first night of the new opera company, and she had passes for the pit, and had promised to take a friend with her. She would, therefore, have to hurry away a little before six, so as to have her tea and be dressed in time.

"Well, I don't know what I shall do," said Kate, sorrowfully. "As for myself, I simply couldn't pass another night out of bed. You know I was up minding my husband all night. Attending a sick man, and one as cross as Ralph, is not very nice, I can assure you."

Miss Hender congratulated herself inwardly that Bill was never likely to want much attendance.

"I think you had better tell Mrs. Barnes that she can't expect the dress; it will be impossible to get it done in the time. I'd be delighted to help you, but I couldn't disappoint my little friend. Besides, you have Mr. Lennox coming here to-day; you'll have to look after the rooms. You can't get the dress done by to-morrow night."

Miss Hender had been waiting for a long time for an opportunity to lead up to Mr. Lennox.

"Oh, dear me!" said Kate, "I had forgotten him, and he'll be coming this afternoon, and may want some dinner, and I'll have to help mother."

"They always have dinner in the afternoon," said Miss Hender, with a feeling of pride at being able to speak authoritatively on the ways and habits of actors.

"Do they?" replied Kate, reflectively; and then, suddenly remembering her promise to the little girls, she said—

"But do you know what part he takes in the play?"

Miss Hender smiled. She always looked pleased when questioned about the theatre, but on this occasion her pleasure was not unmingled with regret. All the stage carpenter had been able to tell her about the company was that it was one of the best travelling; that Frank Bret, the tenor, was supposed to have a wonderful voice; that the amount of presents he received in each town from ladies in the upper ranks of society would set up a small shop; and with a greedy-looking smile on her face she concluded—

"'Tis said that they'd sell the shoes off their feet for him."

Kate laughed, at the same time trying to assume the appearance of being shocked. Miss Hender continued her comments. The stage carpenter had also informed her that Joe Mortimer's performance in the *Cloches* was extraordinary—that he invariably brought the house down in his big scene with the gold; and that Lucy Leslie was the best Clairette going.

Now that they were going to have an actor lodging in their house, Kate felt a certain interest in hearing what such people were like; and she congratulated herself that it was not Mr. Lennox whom the ladies ran after; while Miss Hender gossiped about all she had, or imagined she had, heard. Suddenly Kate remembered that her question relating to Mr. Lennox had remained unanswered.

"But you have not told me what part Mr. Lennox plays. Perhaps he is the man in white who is being dragged away from his bride?"

In making this suggestion her thoughts reverted to what the little girls had said on the subject, and without quite knowing why, she now began to hope that she would find Mr. Lennox something that might command admiration.

Miss Hender thought of him as a sort of avatar who was coming to herald a new age—an age made up of drinks, laughter and coarse jokes, and the suggestion coming from her mistress that he might be going to play the part of the bridegroom had so astonished her that she could only raise her head from her sewing and wait for an explanation. Divining the cause of her embarrassment, Kate said, laughing—

"I have been examining the big picture; the little girls were so curious to know what it meant."

The explanation seemed to disappoint Miss Hender. However, at the end of a long silence she said, like a person after mature reflection—

"Yes, he may play that part; it is called Pom—Pom—Pouet—I can't pronounce it right, it is French. But in any case you'll find him very nice. All theatre people are nice. The other day I went behind to talk to Bill, and Mr. Rickett stopped to speak to me as he was running to make a change."

"What's that?" asked Kate, somewhat bewildered.

"Oh, they call dressing in a hurry, making a change."

"I hope you won't get into trouble; stopping out so late is very dangerous for a young girl. And I suppose you walk up Piccadilly with him after the play?"

"Sometimes he takes me out for a drink," replied Miss Hender, anxious to avoid a discussion on the subject, but at the same time tempted to make a little boast of her independence. "But you must come and see *Madame Angot;* I hear it is going to be beautifully put on, and Mr. Lennox is sure to give you a ticket."

"I daresay I should like it very much; I don't have much amusement."

"Indeed you don't, and what do you get for it? I don't see that Mr. Ede is so kind to you for all the minding and nursing you do; and old Mrs. Ede may repeat all day long that she is a Christian woman, and what else she likes, but it doesn't make her anything less disagreeable. I wouldn't live in a house with a mother-in-law—and such a mother-in-law!"

As she spoke of Mrs. Ede, Miss Hender got her words out in a hurry, knowing well that her mistress would not allow her mother-in-law to be abused in her presence. But Kate, who was very tired and out of spirits, instead of indignantly repudiating Miss Hender's words, contented herself with answering—

"You don't get on with Mrs. Ede, but I don't know what I should do without her: she is the only friend I have."

"That's not so," said Miss Hender, looking affectionately

at Kate, for she really liked her employer, although she could not help feeling some contempt for her scruples of conscience. "Half your time you are shut up in a sick-room, and even when he is well he is always blowing and wheezing. He's not the man that would suit me."

"Ralph is very good to me. He can't help being cross sometimes," said Kate, who was thinking of the fatigue of last night's watching. She felt it still in her bones, and her eyes ached. As she considered the hardships of her life, her manner grew more abandoned. Miss Hender wondered what her companion was thinking about, and waited impatiently for her to speak. Reverie was less to this young woman's taste even than work, and noticing the skirt that was slipping on the floor, she said—

"If you'll let me have the skirt, ma'am, I'll stitch it up."

Kate handed her the silk wearily, and was about to speak when Mrs. Ede entered.

"Mr. Lennox is downstairs," she said, sternly. "I don't know what you'll think of him. I'm a Christian woman and I don't want to misjudge any one, but he looks to me like a person of very loose ways."

Kate flushed a little red with surprise. After a moment she said—

"I suppose I had better go down and see him. But perhaps he won't like the rooms after all. What shall I say to him?"

"Indeed, I can't tell you," said Mrs. Ede, somewhat testily. "I have the dinner to attend to."

"But," said Kate, getting frightened, "you promised me not to say any more on this matter."

"Oh, I say nothing. I'm not mistress here. I told you that I would not interfere with Mr. Lennox; no more I will. Why should I? What right have I? But I may warn you, and I have warned you. I have said my say, and I'll abide by it."

These hard words, showing as they did the unalterable attitude of Mrs. Ede's mind, only tended to confuse Kate; all her doubts returned to her, and she remained irresolute. Miss Hender watched a moment with an expression of contempt on her coarse face, and then returned

to her sewing. As she did so Kate moved towards the door. She waited on the threshold, but seeing that her mother-in-law had turned her back, her courage returned to her and she went down stairs. She felt a little nervous; she generally did when anything was going to happen, and when she caught sight of Mr. Lennox she shrank back frightened. He was a man of about thirty years of age. His face was bronzed, and had it not been for his clear blue eyes he might have passed for an Italian.

Leaning his large body against the counter, he examined a tray of ornaments in black jet. She thought he was handsome. He wore a large soft hat, which was very politely lifted from his head when she entered. The attention embarrassed her, and somewhat awkwardly she interrupted him in his explanations of how he had been recommended to her house, and asked him if he would like to see the rooms. The suddenness of the question seemed to surprise him, and after replying to it affirmatively, he talked of their mutual acquaintance, the agent in advance, and of the difficulty of getting lodgings in the town. As he spoke he stared at her—and he appeared interested in the shop.

It was a very tiny corner, and, like a Samson, Mr. Lennox looked as if he would have only to extend his arms to pull the whole place down upon his shoulders. From the front window round to the kitchen door ran a mahogany counter; behind it, built up to the ceiling, there were lines of cardboard boxes, the lower rows of which were broken and dusty. Spread out upon wires lay several coarse shirts and a couple of pair of stays in pink and blue. At the far end of the counter stood a looking-glass, shaded and sheltered under several shawls which dangled above it. The windows were filled with babies' frocks, hoods, and many pairs of little woollen shoes.

After a few remarks from Mr. Lennox the conversation came to a pause, and Kate asked him again if he would like to see the rooms. He declared he would be delighted. She lifted the flap and let him pass into the house. On the right of the kitchen door there was a small passage, at the end of it the staircase began. The first few steps turned spi-

rally, but after that it ascended like a huge canister or burrow to the first landing.

There, to her annoyance, Kate found Miss Hender peeping and Mrs. Ede gazing scornfully from behind the door of the workroom. But Mr. Lennox did not seem to notice them, and continued to talk affably of the difficulty of finding lodgings in the town.

Even the shabby gentility of the room, which his presence made her realize more vividly than ever, did not appear to strike him. He examined with interest the patchwork cloth that covered the round table, looked complacently at the little green sofa with the two chairs to match, and said that he thought he would be very comfortable. But when Kate noticed how dusty was the pale yellow wall-paper, with its watery roses, she could not help but feeling ashamed, and she wondered how so fine a gentleman as he could be so easily satisfied. Then, plucking up courage, she showed him the little mahogany cheffonier which stood next the door, and explained that it was there she would keep whatever he might order. The chimney-piece was ornamented with a small looking-glass engarlanded with green paper cut into fringes. Mr. Lennox walked nearer, twirled his fair moustache with both hands and admired his whiter teeth.

The inspection of the drawing-room being over, they went up the second portion of the canister-like staircase, and after a turn and a stoop arrived at the bed-room. Mr. Lennox thought the two steps a curious arrangement. Kate feared her husband would call for her, and she was shocked at the appearance of the room: everything was in disorder, and the bed was just as she had left it.

"I am sorry that you should see the room like this, but I was obliged to sleep here last night; my husband—"

"I assure you I take no objection to the fact of your having slept here," he replied gallantly.

Kate blushed violently, and an awkward silence followed.

As Mr. Lennox looked round an expression of dissatisfaction passed over his face. It was a much poorer place than the drawing-room. Religion and poverty went there hand-in-hand. A rickety iron bedstead covered with an-

other patchwork quilt occupied the centre of the room, and there was a small chest of drawers in white wood placed next the fireplace—the smallest and narrowest in the world. Upon the black painted chimney-piece a large red apple made a spot of color. The vulgarity of the blue flower vases hurt the eye. The carpet was in rags, and the lace blinds were torn and hung like fish-nets. Mr. Lennox apparently was not satisfied, but when his eyes fell upon Kate it was clear that he thought that so pretty a woman might prove a compensation. But the pious exhortations hung on the walls seemed to cause him a certain uneasiness. Above the washstand there were two cards bearing the inscriptions, "Thou art my hope," "Thou art my will;" and these declarations of faith were written within a painted garland of lilies and roses.

"I see that you are religious."

"I am afraid not so much as I should be, sir."

"Well, I don't know so much about that; the place is covered with pictures—I mean holy pictures."

"Those were put there by my mother-in-law: she is very good."

"Oh, ah," said Mr. Lennox, apparently much relieved by the explanation. "Old people are very pious, generally, aren't they? But this patchwork quilt is yours, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir; I made it myself," said Kate blushing.

He had made several attempts to talk to her of general things, but she had answered him in briefest phrases. Her whole mind was occupied by one idea, and she could not detach her thoughts from it. "Is he going to take the rooms, I wonder?" she asked herself many times. At last he said—

"I like these apartments very well; and you say that I can have breakfast here?"

"Oh, you can have anything you order, sir. I, or my mother, will—"

"Very well, then; we may consider the matter decided. I'll tell them to send down my things from the theatre."

This seemed to conclude the affair, and they went downstairs. But Mr. Lennox stopped on the next landing, and without any apparent object re-examined the drawing-room.

Speaking like a man who wanted to get up a conversation, he manifested interest in everything, and asked questions concerning the rattle of the sewing-machine, which could be heard distinctly; and before she could stop him he had opened the door of the workroom. He wondered at all the brown paper patterns that were hung on the walls, and Miss Hender, too eager to inform him, profited by the occasion to glide in a word to the effect that she was going to see him that evening at the theatre. Kate was amused, but felt it was her duty to take the first opportunity of interrupting the conversation. For some unexplained reason Mr. Lennox seemed loath to go, and it was with difficulty he was got downstairs. Even then he could not pass the kitchen door without stopping to speak to the apprentices. He asked them where they had found their brown hair and eyes, and attempted to exchange a remark with Mrs. Ede. Kate thought the encounter unfortunate, but it passed off better than she expected. Mrs. Ede replied that the little girls were getting on very well, and, apparently satisfied with this answer, Mr. Lennox turned to go. His manner indicated his Bohemian habits, for after all this waste of time he suddenly remembered that he had an appointment, and would probably miss it by about a quarter of an hour.

"Will you require any dinner?" asked Kate, following him to the door.

At the mention of the word dinner he again appeared to forget all about his appointment. His face changed its expression, and his manner again grew confidential. He asked all kind of questions as to what she could get him to eat, but without ever quite deciding whether he would be able to find time to eat it. Kate thought she had never seen such a man. At last in a fit of desperation, he said—

"I'll have a bit of cold steak. I haven't the time to dine; but if you'll put that out for me. . . . I like a bit of supper after the theatre—"

Kate wished to ask him what he would like to drink with it, but it was impossible to get an answer. He couldn't stop another minute, and, dodging the passers-by, he rushed rapidly down the street. She watched until the big

shoulders were lost in the crowd, and asked herself if she liked the man who had just left her; but the answer slipped from her when she tried to define it, and with a sigh she turned into the shop and mechanically set straight those shirts that hung aslant on the traversing wires. At that moment Mrs. Ede came from the kitchen carrying a basin of soup to her sick son. She wanted to know why Kate had stayed so long talking to that man.

"Talk to him! I suppose if we are going to take his money it is only right that we should try to make him comfortable."

"A miserable ten shillings a week, when by it we are harboring wickedness and sin. I have been taught that no good can come of the knowledge of such people, and I abide by what I have been taught."

With this the old woman went upstairs, backbone and principles equally rigid, leaving Kate to fume at what she termed her mother-in-law's unreasonableness.

But Kate had not time to indulge in many angry thoughts; for before she had been gone a moment the gaunt, spare woman came back with tears in her eyes to beg pardon. The only thing she could not do was to restrain her tongue, and her greatest sorrows were the remembrances of the hard words she had said to "dear Kate." Kate on her side did not return the affection she accepted so warmly as it was given. She liked the old woman well enough; she took her scoldings in good part; but now she felt a little cross with her mother-in-law, and turned away pettishly, when Mrs. Ede said—

"I am so sorry. Did I speak crossly, dear? I'll say no more about the actor, I'll promise."

Kate knew how deeply she was loved, and it was the vague belief that she might rule absolutely if she chose to take up her position, that induced her to acquiesce as calmly as she usually did in her mother-in-law's dictation. Sometimes she felt desirous of assuring herself of the value of her unasserted power. The present instance was a case in point.

"I don't see why I should be bullied in my own house,"

she said. "Why shouldn't I let my rooms to Mr. Lennox if I like?"

"You are right," said Mrs. Ede, "I have perhaps said too much but I am sorry you turn against me."

The tone of suffering the words conveyed touched Kate to the heart, and she answered warmly—

"No, no, mother; I don't turn against you. You are the only person I have to love."

A look of quick pleasure passed over the hard, blunt features of the peasant woman, and she said with tears in her voice—

"You know I'm a bit hard with my tongue, but that's all; I don't mean it."

Nothing more was said, and on the front landing they separated. Kate went into her workroom. Miss Hender, already returned from dinner, was trembling with excitement, and she waited impatiently for the door to be shut that she might talk. She had been round to see her friend the stage carpenter, and he had told her all about the actor. Mr. Lennox was, on this authority, the boss of the show. Mr. Hayes, the acting manager, was a nobody, who was generally pretty well boozed, and Mr. Cox, the London gent, did not travel. Miss Hender's lover had also professed a very high opinion of Mr. Lennox. He had heard of him before, and had expected a fellow up to snuff; but from what he had seen of him that morning he didn't mind saying that he had the whole bag of tricks at his fingers' ends.

Kate listened bewildered, not understanding half of what was said. The superior knowledge Miss Hender displayed of theatrical slang and back-door doings alarmed her. A reproof rose to her lips, but she checked it in her eagerness to learn more about Mr. Lennox.

"And what part does he play in the *Madame Angot,* I think you call it?" she asked as she bent her head to examine the passementerie she was stitching on to the sleeves.

"Oh, the low comedy part," said Miss Hender; but seeing that Kate did not understand, she hastened to explain that the low comedy parts meant the funny parts.

"He's the man who's lost his wig—La—La Ravodée, I think they call it—and a very nice man he is. When I was

talking to Bill I could see Mr. Lennox between the wings; he had his arm round Miss Leslie's shoulder. I'm sure he's sweet on her."

Kate looked up from her work and stared at Miss Hender slowly. The announcement that Mr. Lennox was the funny man was disappointing, but to hear that he was a woman's lover disgusted her at once with him, and she could not help saying—

"All those actors are alike. I see now that my mother-in-law was right. I should not have let him my rooms."

"One's always afraid of saying anything to you, ma'am; you do twist one's words so. I am sure I did not mean to say there was any harm between him and Miss Leslie. There, perhaps you'll go and tell him that I spoke about him."

"I'm sure I shall do nothing of the sort. Mr. Lennox has taken my rooms for a week, and there's an end of it. I am not going to interfere in his private affairs."

The conversation then came to a pause, and all that was heard for a long time was the clicking of the needle and the rustling of silk. Kate wondered how it was that Mr. Lennox was so different off the stage from what he was on, and it seemed to her strange that such a nice gentleman—for she was obliged to admit that he was that—should choose to play the funny parts. As for his connection with Miss Leslie, that of course was none of her business. What did it matter to her whom he was in love with? She would have thought he was a man who would not easily fall in love; but perhaps Miss Leslie was very pretty, and, for the matter of that, they might be going to be married. Miss Hender, in the meanwhile, regretted having told Kate anything about Mr. Lennox. The best and surest way was to let people find out things for themselves. Having an instinctive repugnance to virtue—at least, to questions of conscience—she could not abide whining about spilt milk, and, beyond an occasional reference to their work, the women did not speak again, until at three o'clock Mrs. Ede announced that dinner was ready. There was, however, not much to eat, and Kate had little appetite, and she was glad when the meal was finished. She had then to help

Mrs. Ede in getting the rooms ready, and when this was done it was time for tea. But not even this meal did they get in comfort. Suddenly it was remembered that Mr. Lennox had ordered a beefsteak for supper. Mrs. Ede, however, said she would see to this, and Kate went into the shop to attend to the few customers who might call in the course of the evening. The next event was the departure of Miss Hender, who came downstairs in a violent hurry, saying she had only just allowed herself time to dress and to get to the theatre before the curtain went up. She was very sorry Kate was not coming, but she promised to tell her to-morrow all about Mr. Lennox, and how the piece went. As Kate bade her assistant good night a few customers dropped in, all of whom gave a great deal of trouble. She had to pull down an immense number of packages to find what was wanted, and these had to be tied up and put back in their places. Then her next door neighbor, the stationer's wife, called to ask after Mr. Ede and to buy a reel of cotton; and so, in evening chat, the time passed, until the fruiterer's boy came to ask if he should put up the shutters.

Kate answered affirmatively, and remarked to her friend, who had risen to go, what a nice, kind man Mr. Jones was.

"When Mr. Ede is ill I have nothing to do but to ask, and he sends his boy morning and night to take down and put up my shutters."

"Yes, indeed, they are very kind people, but their prices are very high. Do you deal with them?"

Kate replied that she did; and, as the fruiterer's boy put up the shutters with a series of bangs, she strove to decide her neighbor to buy a certain gown she had been long talking of.

"Trimming and everything, it won't cost you more than thirty shillings; you'll want something fresh now that summer's coming on."

"So I shall. I'll speak to my man about it to-night. I think he'll let me have it."

"He won't refuse you if you press him."

"Well, we shall see."

On this a last good-bye was said, and the stationer's wife

slipped away. The shops were now closing. The streets were filled with dark masses of people who passed in surging confusion towards Piccadilly. The evening was fine. Streaks of purple and touches of yellow were dying out of the west, and the wide gray slopes of the hills rendered insignificant and toylike the unending brick angles of the town. Brick! It was a sea of brick—brick of all colors: the pale brown of the decaying yards, the implacable red brick that turns to purple of the newly built warehouses, whilst overhead an uninterrupted succession of scarlet-tiled roofs pointed their sharp backs to the light of a few wan stars.

Kate stood for a long time looking at the hills that faded into the night-clouds, and against the huge gray background the bright small flames of gas-jets started and remained before her like golden nails upon the face of a door.

Her thoughts drifted vaguely. She thought of what she had thought of a hundred times before. The same ideas turned in her brain monotonously, as the hands of a clock round the dial. She wondered if her lodger would be satisfied with her mother-in-law's cooking. She hoped so. He was a very nice man, and it would be tiresome if they did not pull together. Then as his image floated from her Kate feared seriously for Miss Hender's virtue. If Mrs. Ede knew of her conduct there was not a doubt but she would not allow her in the house. The difficulty she was in with Mrs. Barnes's dress next suggested itself, and with a shiver and a sigh she shut the street door and went upstairs. The day had passed; it was gone like a hundred days before it—wearily, perhaps, yet leaving in the mind an impression of something done, of duties honestly accomplished.

CHAPTER III

"OH, ma'am!" broke in Miss Hender, "you can't think how amusing it was last night. I never enjoyed myself so much in my life. The place was crammed. You never saw such a house, and Miss Leslie got three encores, and a call after each act."

"And what was Mr. Lennox like?"

"Oh, he only played a small part—one of the policemen. He don't play Pom-poncet; I was wrong. It is too heavy a part, and he's too busy looking after the piece. But Joe Mortimer was splendid: I nearly died of laughing when he fell down, and lost his wig in the middle of the stage. And Frank Bret looked so nice, and he got an encore for his song, 'Oh, certainly I love Clairette.' And he and Miss Leslie got another for the duet. To-morrow they play the *Cloches*."

"But now you've seen so much of the theatre, I hope you'll be able to do a little overtime with me. I have promised to let Mrs. Barnes have her dress by to-morrow morning."

"I'm afraid I sha'n't be able to stay after six o'clock."

"But surely if they are doing the same play you don't want to see it again?"

"Well, 'tisn't exactly that, but—well, I prefer to tell you the truth; tisn't for the piece I go to the theatre; I am one of the dressers, and I get twelve shillings a week, and I can't afford to lose it. But there's no use in telling that to Mrs. Ede; she'd only kick up a row."

"How do you mean, dressing?"

"The ladies of the theatre must have some one to dress them, and I look after the principals—Miss Leslie and Miss Beaumont, that's all."

"And how long have you been doing that?"

"Why, about a month now. Bill got me the place."

This conversation had broken in upon a silence of nearly

half an hour. For about that time not a word had been spoken; with bent heads and clicking needles, Kate and Miss Hender had been working assiduously at Mrs. Barnes's skirt.

Having a great deal of passementerie ornamentation to sew on to the heading of the flounces, and much fringe to arrange round the edging of the drapery, Kate looked forward to a heavy day. She had expected Miss Hender an hour earlier, and she had not turned up until after nine. An assistant whose time was so occupied that she couldn't give an extra hour when you were in a difficulty was of very little use, and the sooner her place was supplied the better. Besides, all this talk about theatres and actors was very wrong; there could be little doubt but that the girl was losing her character, and to have her coming about the house would give it a bad name. Such were Kate's reflections as she handled the rustling silk and folded it into large plaitings. Now and again she tried to come to a determination, but she was not sincere with herself. She knew she liked the girl, and would not find the courage to dismiss her. Miss Hender's conversation amused her, and to send her away meant to surrender herself completely to her mother-in-law's stern kindness and her husband's irritability.

Miss Hender was the window through which Kate viewed the bustle and animation of life, and she dreaded the darkness that the closing of it would bring. Even now, annoyed as she was that she would not be able to get the dress done in time, she could not refrain from listening to the girl's chatter. There was about Miss Hender that dominating charm which material natures possess even when they offend. Being of the flesh we must sympathize with it, and the amiability of Miss Hender's spirits made a great deal pass that would have otherwise appeared shocking. She could tell—without appearing too rude—how Mr. Wentworth, the lessee, was gone on a certain lady in the new company, and would give her anything if she would chuck up her engagement and come and live with him. When Miss Hender told these stories, Kate, fearing that Mrs. Ede might have overheard, looked anxiously at the door, and under the influence of the emotion, it interested

her to warn her assistant of the perils of frequenting bad company. But as Kate lectured she could not help wondering how it was that her life passed by so wearily. Was she never going to do anything else but work, she often asked herself. How hateful it was! Then to repulse these thoughts, which she knew were wicked, she would seek consolation in thinking of her excellent conduct. She would often thank God that she had nothing to reproach herself with, and it afforded her a kind of calm enjoyment to look back upon her tranquil working life.

Her story, until the arrival of Mr. Lennox, was unmarked by any event of importance, and its psychological significance can be well and easily inferred from the following statement of the facts.

Kate had never known her father; her mother was a hard-working woman, an earnest believer in Wesley, who made a pound a week by painting on china. This was amply sufficient for their wants; so Mrs. Howell's only terrors were that she might not succeed in saving her soul, or might lose her health, die before her time, and leave her daughter in want. To avoid this calamity she worked early and late at the factory, and Kate was left in the charge of the landlady, a childless old woman who, sitting by the fire, used to tell stories of her deceptions and misfortunes in life. The little girl considered these hours quite delicious, and her childish brain was thus early intoxicated with sentiment. It will therefore be seen that the mother's influence was at an unfortunate time counteracted, and the Bible readings and extemporary prayers offered up by their bedside in the evening had been neutralized earlier in the day. Schooldays came next in Kate's youth, but they were unimportant, and exercised little influence on her after life.

And, like an empty dream, eighteen years passed. Kate grew softly and mystically as a dark damask rose into a pretty woman, with a soul made up two-thirds of sentiment, and one-third of superstition. For, notwithstanding her early training, religion had never taken a very firm hold upon her. Although she had married into a family very similar to her own, although her mother-in-law was almost

a counterpart of her real mother—a little harder and more resolute, but as Godfearing and as kind—Kate had caught no blast of religious fervor; it had taught her nothing, inspired her with nothing, could influence her in little. She was not strong nor great, nor was she conscious of any deep feeling that if she acted otherwise than she did she would be living an unworthy life. She was merely good because she was a kind-hearted woman, without bad impulses, and admirably suited to the life she was leading.

But in this commonplace inactivity of mind there was one strong characteristic, one bit of color in all these gray tints: Kate was dreamy, not to say imaginative. When she was a mere child she loved fairies, and took a vivid interest in goblins; and when afterwards she discarded these stories for others, it was not because it shocked her logical sense to read of a beanstalk a hundred feet high, but for a tenderer reason. Jack did not find a beautiful lady to love him. She could not help feeling disappointed, and when the *London Journal* came for the first time across her way, with the story of a broken heart, her own heart melted with sympathy. And the more sentimental and unnatural the romance, the more it fevered and enraptured her. She loved to read of singular subterranean combats, of high castles, prisoners, hair-breadth escapes; and her sympathies were always with the fugitives. It was also very delightful to hear of lovers who were true to each other in spite of a dozen wicked uncles, of women who were tempted until their hearts died within them, and who years after threw up their hands and said, "Thank God that I had the courage to resist."

And the second period of her sentimental education was when she passed from the authors who deal exclusively with knights, princesses, and kings, to those who interest themselves in the love fortunes of doctors and curates.

Amid these there was one story that interested her in particular, that caused her deeper emotions than perhaps even the others had done. It concerned a beautiful young woman with a lovely oval face, who was married to a very tiresome country doctor. This lady was in the habit of reading Byron and Shelley in a rich, sweet-scented meadow,

down by the river which flowed dreamily through smiling pasturelands adorned by spreading trees. But this meadow belonged to a young squire, a superb man with grand, broad shoulders, who day after day used to watch these readings by the river, without, however, venturing to address a word to the fair trespasser. One day, however, he was startled by a shriek; in her poetical dreamings the lady had slipped into the water. A moment sufficed to tear off his coat, and as he swam like a water-dog, he had no difficulty in rescuing her. After this adventure he had, of course, to call and inquire, and from henceforth his visits grew more and more frequent, and by a strange coincidence, he used generally to come riding up to the hall-door when the husband was away curing the ills of the country folk. Hours never to be forgotten were passed under the trees by the river, he pleading his cause, and she refusing to leave poor Arthur—he was too good a fellow. Heart-broken, at last the squire gave up the pursuit, and went to foreign parts, where he waited thirty years until he heard Arthur was dead. Then he came back with a light heart to his first and only love, who had never ceased to think of him, and lived with her happily forever afterwards. The grotesque mixture of prose and poetry, both equally false, used to enchant Kate, and she always fancied had she been the heroine of the book that she would have acted in the same way.

The taste for novel-reading caused Kate's mother the deepest distress; she thought it "a sinful waste of time, not to speak of the way it turned people's heads from God;" and when one day she found Kate's scrap-book, made up of poems cut from the *Family Herald*, she began to despair of her daughter's salvation. For notwithstanding all her efforts, she could not awake the girl to this belief, and the answer Kate generally made to her mother's reproaches was: "Mother, I have been sewing all day; I can't see what harm it can be to read a little before I go to bed. Nobody is required to be always saying their prayers."

The next two years passed away unperceived by either mother or daughter, and then an event occurred of some importance. Their neighbors at the corner of the street got into difficulties, and were eventually sold out and their

places taken by strangers, who changed the oil-shop into a drapery business. The new arrivals caused, of course, the keenest interest, and Mrs. Howell and her daughter called to see what they were like, as did everybody else. The acquaintance thus formed was renewed at church, where, much to their surprise and pleasure, they discovered that they were of the same persuasion.

Henceforth the Howells and Edes saw a great deal of each other, and every Sunday after church the mothers walked on in front, and, at a distance of thirty yards, the young people followed. Ralph spoke of his ill-health, and Kate pitied him, and when he complimented her on her beautiful hair she blushed with pleasure. For such as she had revelled in fictitious sentiment, she had somehow never thought of seeking it in nature, and now that she had found a lover, the critical sense was not strong enough in her to lead her to compare reality with imagination, and she accepted Ralph as unsuspectingly as she had before accepted the tawdry poetry of her favorite fiction. Her nature not being a passionate one, she was able to do this without any apparent transition of sentiment. She pitied him, hoped she could be of use in nursing him, and then felt flattered at the idea of being mistress of a shop.

The mothers, whose thoughts had been travelling for some time in the same direction, were delighted. No marriage could in their eyes be more desirable. Religious opinions coincided, and dressmaking was a suitable adjunct to the drapery business. Kate brought the talent, Ralph the means of putting it into execution, and very soon after she was installed in her own workroom. Of love small mention was made. The bridegroom spoke of his prospects, of improving the business, the bride listened, interested for the while in his enthusiasm; orders came in, and Kate was soon transformed into a hard-working woman.

With marriage her reading ceased, and the scrap-book was left to sleep at the bottom of an old trunk. This change of character passed unperceived by all but Mrs. Howell, who died wondering how it had come about. Kate herself did not know, and she fancied that it was fully ac-

counted for by the fact that she had no time,—"no time for reading now."

This was no more than the truth; but she did not complain; she accepted her husband's kisses as she did the toil he imposed on her—meekly, unaffectedly, as a matter of course. Apparently she had known all through that the romances which used so strongly to fascinate her were merely idle dreams, having no bearing upon the daily life of human beings—things fit to amuse a young girl's fancies, and to be thrown aside when the real cares of life were entered upon. The only analogy between the past and present was an ample submission to authority and an indifference to the world and its interest. Even the fact of being without children did not seem to concern her, and when her mother-in-law regretted it she merely smiled languidly, or said, "We are very well as we are."

Of the world and the flesh she lived in ignorance, suspecting their existence only through Miss Hender. For some months past a friendship had been steadily growing up between the two women. Miss Hender was attracted by her employer's kindness and softness of manner, Kate by her assistant's strength of will. Had she known for certain of the existence of a lover she would not have kept her, but the possibility of sin attached her to the girl in the sense that it forced her continually to think of her. And then there was a certain air of bravado in Miss Hender's freckled face that Kate unconsciously admired. She instituted comparisons between herself and the assistant, and she generally came to the conclusion that she preferred that fair, blooming, blonde complexion to her own clear olive-colored skin, and the sparkle of the red frizzy hair disgusted her with the thick wavy blue tresses which encircled, as would a piece of black velvet, her small temples.

As she continued her sewing she reconsidered the question of Miss Hender's dismissal, but only to perceive more and more clearly the blank it would occasion in her life. But besides her personal feeling there was the important fact to consider, that to satisfy her customers she must have an assistant who could be depended upon. And she did not know where she would find another who would

turn out work equal to Miss Hender's. At last Kate said:—

"I don't know what I shall do; I promised the dress by to-morrow morning."

"I think we'll be able to finish it to-day," said Miss Hender; "I'll work hard at it all the afternoon; a lot can be done between this and seven o'clock."

"Oh, I don't know," replied Kate dolefully; "these leaves take such a time to sew on; and then there's all the festooning."

"I think it can be managed, but we must stick at it."

On this expression of good will the conversation ceased for the time being, and the clicking of needles and the buzzing of flies about the brown-paper patterns was all that was heard until, about twelve o'clock, Mrs. Ede burst into the room.

"I knew what it would be," she said, shutting the door after her.

"What is it said Kate, looking up frightened.

"Well, I offered to do him a chop or some fried eggs, but he says he must have an omelette. Did you ever hear of such a thing? I told him I didn't know how to make one, but he said that I was to ask you if you could spare the time."

"I'll make him an omelette," said Kate rising. "Have you got the eggs?"

"Yes. The trouble that man gives us! What with his bath in the morning, and two pairs of boots to be cleaned, and the clothes that have to be brushed, I have done nothing but attend to him since ten o'clock; and what hours to keep!—it is now past eleven."

"What's the use of grumbling? You know that the work must be done, and I can't be in two places at once. You promised me you wouldn't say anything more about it, but would attend to him just the same as any other lodger."

"I can't do more than I am doing; I haven't done anything all the morning but run upstairs," said Mrs. Ede very crossly; "and I wish you'd take the little girls out of the kitchen, I can't look after them, and they do nothing but look out of the window."

"Very well, I'll have them up here; they can sit on the sofa. We can mange with them now that we have finished the cutting out."

Miss Hender made no reply to this last speech, which was addressed to her. There was nothing she hated so much as having the little girls up in the workroom.

To make Mr. Lennox's omelette did not take Kate a long while. There was a bright fire in the kitchen, the muffins were toasted, and the tea was made.

"This is a very small breakfast," she said as she put the plates and dishes on the tray. "Didn't he order anything else?"

"He spoke about some fried bacon, but I'll attend to that; you take the other things up to him."

As Kate passed with the tray in her hand she reproved the little girls for their idleness and told them to come upstairs, but it was not until she motioned them into the workroom that she realized that she was going into Mr. Lennox's room. After a slight pause she turned the handle of the door and entered.

Mr. Lennox was lying very negligently wrapped in his dressing-gown.

"Oh, I beg your pardon, sir; I didn't know—" she said, starting back.

Then, blushing violently for shame at her own silliness in taking notice of such things, she laid the breakfast things on the table. He, however, did not seem the least put out by her discomfiture; but wrapping himself up more closely, drew his chair forward, and smacked his lips. As he did so he said—

"I hope I haven't shocked you, but I didn't know you were coming in, and I always like to sit an hour or two in my dressing-gown before dressing."

"Oh, it doesn't matter," she said, hating him for the moment for forcing her to allude to the subject again. "I hope you'll like your omelette, sir."

"Oh, very nice indeed," he replied, taking the cover off the dish, "but I am afraid I have given you a great deal of trouble; that old lady told me you were very, very busy."

"I have to finish a dress to-day, sir, and my assistant——"

Here Kate stopped, remembering that as Mr. Lennox had probably renewed his acquaintance with Miss Hender at the theatre, any allusion to her would give rise to further conversation,—and she now thought only of escaping from the room.

"Oh yes, I know Miss Hender; she's one of our dressers; she looks after our two leading ladies, Miss Leslie and Miss Beaumont. But I don't see the bacon here."

"Mrs. Ede is cooking it; she'll bring it up in a minute or two." said Kate, edging towards the door.

"We have nothing to do with the dressers," said Mr. Lennox, speaking rapidly, so as to detain his landlady; "but if you are as pressed with your work as you tell me, I daresay, by speaking to the lessee, I might manage to get Miss Hender off for this one evening."

"Thank you, sir; I am sure it is very kind of you, but I shall be able to manage without that."

Mr. Lennox spoke with such an obvious desire to oblige that Kate could not choose but like him, and it made her wish all the more that he would cover up his big, bare neck.

"'Pon my word this is a capital omelette," he said, as he greedily devoured the yellow substance. "There is nothing I like so much as a good omelette. I was very lucky to come here," he added, glancing at Kate's waist, which was slim even in her old blue striped dress.

"It is very kind of you to say so, sir," she said, and a glow of rose-color flushed the dark complexion. There was something very human in this big man, and Kate did not know whether his animalism irritated or pleased her.

"You were not at the thearte last night?" he said, forcing a huge piece of deeply-buttered spongy French roll into his mouth.

"No, sir, I wasn't there; I rarely go to the theatre."

"Ah, I'm sorry. How's that? We had a tremendous house. I never saw the piece go better. If this business keeps up to the end of the week I think we shall try to get another date."

Kate did not know what "another date" meant, but she resolved to ask Miss Hender.

"You have only to tell me when you want to see the piece, and I'll give you places. Would you like to come to-night?"

"Not to-night, thank you, sir. I shall be busy all the evening, and my husband is not very well."

The conversation then came to a pause. Mr. Lennox scraped up the last fragments of the omelette, and had just poured himself out another cup of tea, when Mrs. Ede appeared with the broiled bacon. At once, on seeing Kate talking to Mr. Lennox, she assumed an air of mingled surprise and regret.

Kate noticed this, but Mr. Lennox had no eyes for anything but the bacon, which he heaped on his plate and devoured voraciously. It pleased Kate to see him enjoy his breakfast, but while she was admiring him Mrs. Ede said as she moved towards the door, "Can I do anything for you, sir?"

"Well, no," replied Mr. Lennox indifferently; but seeing that Kate was going too he swallowed a mouthful of tea hastily and said, "I was just telling this lady here that we had a tremendous success last night, and that she ought to come and see the piece. I think she said she had no one to go with. You should take her. I'm sure you will like the *Cloches*."

Kate looked startled at this proposition, and Mrs. Ede looked indignant. After a moment she recovered herself, and she said severely and emphatically, "Thank you, sir, but I'm a Christian woman. No offense, sir, but I don't think such things are right."

"Ah! don't you, indeed?" replied the actor, looking at her in blank astonishment. But the expression of his face soon changed, and as if struck suddenly by some painful remembrance, he said, "You are a Dissenter or something of that kind, I suppose. We lost a lot of money at Bradford through people of your persuasion; they jolly well preached against us."

To this speech Mrs. Ede made no reply, and Kate, frightened out of her life, certain that something terrible

was going to happen, made a hurried explanation that her mother-in-law held very severe views, but that it would not do for us all to think alike.

This brought the conversation to a dead lock, and it was clear to all parties that they felt too deeply on the subject to trust themselves to further argument. Mrs. Ede accepted the suggestion that "Ralph might be waiting for something upstairs," and after a few brief and apologetic phrases Kate withdrew discountenanced to her workroom.

Would Mr. Lennox take offense and leave them? was the question she asked herself as she sat sewing passementerie leaves on to the silk sleeves. Occasionally Miss Hender looked up inquiringly. She suspected that something had occurred, and was dying to hear what it was; but there sat those idiotic little girls, and of course it wouldn't do to speak before them. Nevertheless from time to time she hazarded an indirect allusion. Once she hinted she had heard that Mr. Lennox, although a very nice man, was a bit quick-tempered.

Kate answered this query evasively. She said that it was difficult to know what Mr. Lennox was like, and with that remark she allowed the conversation to fall to the ground. Words were to her an effort, and she could not detach a single precise thought from the leaden-colored dreams which hung about her.

Click, click, went the needles all day long. Mrs. Barnes was Kate's best customer, but she could not understand what a woman who lived in a thirty pound house could want with a ten pound dress. But that was no affair of hers, and as it was most important she should not disappoint her, Kate kept Miss Hender to dinner; and as compensation for the press of work, she sent round to the public for three extra half-pints. They needed a drink, for the warmth of the day was intense. Along the red tiles of the houses, amid the brick courtyards, the sun's rays created an oven-like atmosphere. From the high wall opposite the dead glare poured into the little front kitchen through the muslin blinds, burning the pot of greenstuff, and falling in large spots upon the tiled floor. Overcome by the heat, the two women lay back on the little red calico-covered sofa,

languidly sipping their beer, and thinking vaguely of when they would have to commence work again. Miss Hender lolled with her legs stretched out; Kate wearily rested her head upon her hand; Mrs. Ede sat straight, apparently unheeding the sunlight which fell across the plaid shawl which she wore winter and summer. She drank her beer in quick gulps, as if even the time for swallowing was rigidly portioned out. The others watched her, knowing that when her pewter was empty she would turn them out of the kitchen. In a few moments she said, "I think, Kate, that if you're in a hurry you'd better get on with your dress. I have to see to Mr. Lennox's dinner, and I can't have you a-hanging about. As it is I don't know how I am to get the work done. There is a leg of mutton to be roasted, and a pudding to be made, and all by four o'clock."

Kate calmed the old woman with a few words, and taking Ralph's dinner from her, carried it upstairs. She found her husband better, but he complained of being neglected. Setting the tray on the edge of the bed, she briefly answered the questions he put to her concerning the actor, then begged of him to excuse her, and slipped out of the room. About half-past three Mr. Lennox came in with two men, whom she found out afterwards to be Joe Mortimer the low comedian and young Montgomery the conductor. Miss Hender was in a wild state of curiosity, and it became difficult to prevent her from listening at the doors, and almost useless to remind her of the fact that there were children present, so excited did she become when she spoke of Bret's love affairs.

But at six o'clock, she put on her hat determinedly; the children took their leave at the same time, and Kate was left to finish the silk dress alone. There was still much to be done, and when Mrs. Ede called from the kitchen that tea was ready, Kate did not at first answer, and when she did descend she did not remain above ten minutes,—just long enough to eat piece of bread and butter. Her head was filled with grave forebodings, which gradually drifted and concentrated into one fixed idea, not to disappoint Mrs. Barnes. Once, and quite suddenly, she was startled by an

idea which, led up to by nothing, flashed across her mind, and stopping in the middle of a leaf, she considered the question that had propounded itself. Lodgers often made love to their landladies; what would she do if he made love to her? such a thing might occur. An expression of annoyance contracted her face, and she passively resumed her sewing. The hours passed slowly and oppressively. It was now ten o'clock; the tail had still to be bound with braid, and the side-strings to be sewn in. Having no tape by her, she thought of putting off these finishing-touches till the morning, but plucking up her courage, she determined to go down and fetch from the shop what was required. The walk did her good, but it was hard to sit down again to work; and the next few minutes seemed to her interminable: but at last the last stitch was given, the thread bitten off, and the dress held up in triumph. She looked at it for a moment with a feeling of pride, which soon faded into a sensation of profound lassitude.

However, her day's labor was over, and she was now free. But the thought carried with it a savor of bitterness, for she remembered that there was no place for her to go to but her sick husband's room. Unconsciously she had been looking forward to having at least one night's rest, and it exasperated her to think that there was nothing for her but a hard pallet in the backroom, and the certainty of being awakened several times to attend to her husband. Then she asked passionately if she was always going to remain a slave and a drudge? Miss Hender's words came back to her with a strange distinctness, and she saw that of pleasure, or even of happiness, she knew nothing; and in a very simple way she wondered what were really the ends of life. She longed to be good and religious, like her mother or her mother-in-law, but somehow she could never feel as they did, it all seemed so far away. Of course it was a great consolation to think there was a happier and better world; still—still——. Not being able to pursue the thread any further, she stopped puzzled, and when her thoughts again detached themselves, she was thinking of the lady who used to read Byron and Shelley, and who so bravely resisted her lover's entreaties. Every part of the forgotten story came

back to her. She completely realized the place they used to dream in. She could see them watching with ardent eyes the paling of the distant sky as they listened to the humming of insects, breathing the honied odor of the flowers; she saw her leaning on his arm caressingly, whilst pensively she tore with the other hand the leaves as they passed up the long terrace.

Then, as the vision became more personal, and she identified herself with the heroine of the book, she thought of the wealth of love she had to give, and it seemed to her unutterably sad that it should, like a rose in a desert, lie unknown and unappreciated.

This was the last flight of her dream. The frail wings of her imagination could sustain her no longer, and too weary to care for or even to think of anything, she went upstairs. There she found Mrs. Ede painting her son's chest and back with iodine. He had had a bad attack, which was beginning to subside. His face was haggard, his eyes turgid, and his laboring chest produced the whole asthmatic scale, from the highest wheeze to the lowest grunt. The usual vapory smell of ether pervaded the room, and the lamp burned with a fierce red glow behind the red petticoat.

The two women talked together. Mrs. Ede, indignant, told of the trouble she had had with the dinner. She had had to fetch cigars and drinks. Kate listened, watching her husband all the while. He at last began to get a little better, and Mrs. Ede took advantage of the occasion to suggest that it was time for evening prayers.

In days when speech was possible, it was Mr. Ede who read the customary chapter of the Bible and led the way with the Lord's Prayer; but when words were forbidden to him his mother supplied his place. The tall figure knelt straight. It was not a movement of cringing humility, but of stalwart belief, and Kate, as she handed her the Bible, could not help thinking that there was pride in her mother-in-law's very knees.

The old woman turned over the leaves for a few seconds in silence; then, having determined on a chapter, began to read. But she had not got beyond a few sentences before

she was interrupted by the sound of laughing voices and stamping feet.

Horrified, she stopped reading, and looked from Kate to her husband. He was at the moment searching for his pocket-handkerchief. Trembling, Kate rose to assist him, and Mrs. Ede said,

"It is shameful! 'tis disgraceful!"

"It is only Mr. Lennox coming in."

"Only Mr. Lennox!" At that moment she was interrupted by the lighter laughter of female voices, and she paused to listen. Then shutting the book fiercely she said, "From the first I was against letting our rooms to an actor; but I certainly did not think I should live to see my son's house turned into a nighthouse. I shall not stop here."

"Not stop here, eh, eh? We must tell—tell him that it can't be allowed," wheezed Mr. Ede, as he mopped his sweating face.

"And I should like to know who are these women he has dared to bring into— People he has met in Piccadilly, I suppose!"

"Oh, no!" interrupted Kate. "I am sure that they are the ladies of the theatre."

"And where's the difference?" Mrs. Ede asked fiercely. Sectarian hatred of worldly amusement flamed in her eyes, and made common cause with the ordinary prejudice of the British landlady. Mr. Ede shared his mother's opinion; but as he was then suffering from a splitting headache, his chief desire was that she should lower the tone of her voice.

"For goodness sake, don't speak so loud!" he said plaintively. "Of course he mustn't bring women into the house; but he had better be told so. Kate, go down and tell him that these ladies must leave."

Hearing her fate thus determined, Kate stood aghast, and she asked herself how she was to tell Mr. Lennox that he must put his friends out of doors. She hesitated, and during a long silence all three listened. A great guffaw, a woman's shriek, a peal of laughter, and then a clinking of glasses was heard. Even Kate's face admitted that she thought it very improper, and Mrs. Ede said with a theatrical air of suppressed passion:

"Very well; I suppose that is all that can be done at present."

Feeling very helpless, Kate murmured, "I do not see how I am to tell them to go. Hadn't we better put it off until morning?"

"Till morning!" said Mr. Ede, trying to button his dirty night-shirt across his hairy chest. "I'm not going to listen to that noise all night. Kate, you g—go and tur—r—n them out."

"I'm sorry, dearie," said Mrs. Ede, seeing her daughter-in-law's distress. "I'll soon send them away."

"Oh, no! I'd rather go myself," said Kate.

"Very well, dear. I only thought you might not like to go down among a lot of rough people."

The row downstairs was in the meanwhile increasing. Ralph grew as angry as his asthma would allow him. "They are killing me with their noise. Go down at once and tell them they must leave the house instantly. If you don't I'll go myself."

With a look of horror at this threat, Mrs. Ede made a movement towards the door, but Kate stopped her, saying, "I'll go; it is my place." As she descended the stairs she heard a man's voice screaming above the general hubbub:

"I'll tell you what, if Miss Beaumont doesn't wait for my beat another night, I'll insist on a rehearsal being called. She took the concerted music in the finale of the first act two whole bars before her time. It was damned awful. I nearly broke my stick trying to stop her."

"Quite true; I never saw the piece go so bad. Bret was 'fluffing' all over the shop."

Kate listened vaguely to these fragments of conversation, and tremblingly asked herself how she was to walk in upon those people and tell them that they must keep quiet.

"And the way Beaumont tries to spoon with Dick. She nearly missed her cue once with sneaking after him in the wings."

A peal of laughter followed. This sally determined Kate to act; and, without having made up her mind what she was

going to say, she turned the handle of the door and walked into the room.

The three gasburners were blazing, wineglasses were on the table, and Mr. Lennox stood twisting a corkscrew into a bottle which he held between his fat thighs. As Kate entered he looked up.

On the little green sofa Miss Lucy Leslie lay back, playing with her bonnet-strings. Her legs were crossed, and a lifted skirt showed a bit of striped stocking. Next her, with his spare legs sprawled over the arm of the easy-chair, was Mr. Montgomery, the thinnest being possible to imagine, in gray clothes. His nose was enormous, and he pushed up his glasses when Kate came into the room with a movement of the left hand that was clearly habitual. On the other side of the round table sat Mr. Joe Mortimer, the heavy lead, the celebrated miser in the *Cloches*. A tall girl standing behind him playfully twisted his back-hair. He addressed paternal admonitions to her from time to time in an artificially cracked voice.

"Please, sir," said Kate pleadingly, "I'm very sorry, but we cannot keep open house after eleven o'clock."

A deep silence followed this announcement. Miss Leslie looked up at Kate curiously. Mr. Lennox stopped twisting the corkscrew into the bottle, and his big blue eyes beamed with amazement.

Then the low comedian, seizing the opportunity, murmured in his mechanical voice to the girl behind him, "Open house! Of course, she's quite right. I knew there was a draught somewhere; I felt my hair blowing about."

Everybody laughed, and the merriment contributed to still further discountenance the workwoman.

"Will he never speak and let me go?" she asked herself. At last he did speak, and his words fell upon her like blows.

"I don't know what you mean, Mrs. Ede," he said in a loud, commanding voice. "I made no agreement with you that I was not to bring friends home with me in the evening. Had I known that I was taking lodgings in a church I wouldn't have come."

Kate did not know what answer to make. She felt dread-

fully humiliated, and nothing was really present in her mind but a vague desire to conciliate Mr. Lennox.

"It is not my fault, sir. I really don't mind; but my mother-in-law and my husband will not have people coming into the house after ten o'clock."

Mr. Lennox's face showed that his heart had softened towards her, and when she mentioned that her husband was lying ill in bed, turning round to his company he said,

"I think we are making too much noise; we should not like it ourselves if——"

But just at that moment, when all was about to end pleasantly, Mrs. Ede was heard at the top of the stairs.

"I am a Christian woman, and will not remain in a house where drinking and women——"

This speech changed everything. Mr. Lennox's eyes flashed with passion. He made a movement as if he were going to shout an answer back to Mrs. Ede, but checking himself he said, addressing Kate, "I beg that you will leave my rooms, ma'am. You can give me warning in the morning if you like, or rather, I'll give it to you; but for this evening, at least, the place is mine, and I shall do what I like." On that he advanced towards the door and threw it open.

Tears stood in her eyes. She looked sorrowfully at Mr. Lennox. It was a pitiful, appealing glance which he noticed, but was too angry to understand. The look was her whole soul. She did not see Miss Leslie sneering, nor Mr. Montgomery's grinning face. She saw Mr. Lennox, and nothing but him, and stunned by the thought of his leaving them, she followed her mother-in-law upstairs. The old woman scolded and rowed. To have that lot of men and women smoking and drinking after eleven o'clock in the house was not to be thought of, and she tried to force her son to say that the police must sent for. But it was impossible to get an answer from him; the excitement and effort of speaking had rendered him speechless, and, holding his moppy black hair with both hands, he wheezed in deep organ tones. Kate looked at him blankly. To sit up with him another night she felt was impossible, and she longed for some place out of hearing of his breath and out

of the smell of the medicine-bottles. His mother, who was now insisting on his taking a couple of pills, called upon Kate to find the box. The sharp, sickly odor of the aloes was abominable, and with her stomach turning, she watched her husband trying vainly, with the aid of a glass of water, to swallow the dose. Stop in this room! no, that she couldn't do; it would poison her. She wanted sleep and fresh air. Where could she get them? The actor was in the spare bedroom; but he would be gone to-morrow, and she could be left alone. The thought startled her, though she soon forgot it in her impetuous longing to get out of her husband's sight. Every moment this desire grew stronger, and at last she said,

"I cannot stay here; another night would kill me. Will you let me have your room?"

"Certainly I will, my dear," replied the old woman, astonished not so much at the request, but at the vehemence of the emphasis laid upon the words. "You are looking dreadfully worn out, my dear; I will see to my boy."

When once her request had been granted, Kate felt the burning wish grew cold in her heart. She hesitated as if she feared she was doing wrong, and she looked at her husband wondering if he would call her back.

But he took no heed; his attention was too entirely occupied by his breath to think either of her or of the necessity of sending for the police, and he waved his mother away when she attempted to speak to him. Then, turning to Kate as the next person in authority, she asked,

"Are those men going to stop there all night?"

"Oh! I really don't know; I am too tired to bother about it any more," replied Kate petulantly. "It is all your fault—you are to blame for everything; you have no right to interfere with the lodgers in my house."

Mrs. Ede raised her arms as she sought for words, but Kate, without giving her time to answer, walked out of the room. Suddenly a voice cried in a high key,

"Who do you take me for, Dick? I wasn't born yesterday. A devilish pretty woman, if you ask me; and what black hair!"

Kate stopped. "Black hair," she said to herself, "they must be talking of me," and she listened intently.

The remark, however, did not appear to have been particularly well timed, for after a long silence, a woman's voice said,

"Well, I don't know whether he likes her, and I don't care, but what I'm not going to do is to wait here listening to you all cracking up a landlady's good looks. I'm off."

A scuffle then seemed to be taking place; half-a-dozen voices spoke together, and in terror of her life Kate flew across the workroom to Mrs. Ede's bed.

The door of the sitting-room was flung open, and cajoling and protesting words echoed along the passage and up and down the burrow-like staircase. It was undoubtedly disgraceful, and Kate expected every minute to hear her mother-in-law's voice mingling in the fray. However, peace was restored, and for at least an hour she listened to sounds of laughing voices mingling with the clinking of glasses. But at last Dick wished his friends good-night, and they went, leaving a long dark silence behind. Kate, who lay trembling under the sheets, listened. Something was going to happen. "He thinks me a pretty woman; she is jealous," were phrases that rang without ceasing in her ears. Then hearing his door open she fancied he was coming to seek her, and in consternation buried herself under the bedclothes, leaving only her black hair over the pillows to show where she had disappeared. But the duplicate drop of a pair of boots was conclusive, and assuring herself that he would not venture on such a liberty, she strove to compose herself to sleep.

CHAPTER IV

BOUT eleven o'clock on the following day Kate walked up Market Street with Mrs. Barnes's dress. She had just received an angry letter from that lady, saying that she would not require the dress—that it was now of no earthly use to her. This was a very serious matter, and as Kate walked with her face set against the empty square of sky, set in the end of the street as in a frame, she thought of what she could say to satisfy her client.

Market Street, although scarcely less rigid, presented a less mercantile appearance than the rest of Hanley. There was just a feeble look of idleness about it which was visible nowhere else. In the open place at the bottom of the hill crowds of children were constantly playing about three dilapidated swings and a merry-go-round. The green and yellow paint of these neglected toys suggested fancies that faded as the eye scanned the acres of bare brick. Half of the pipe of the shooting-gallery had been broken away, and was lying amid the wheels of a dilapidated showman's cart. These were the only signs of decay the town possessed. Even the factory chimneys looked new, and the dwelling-houses seemed as if they had been run up according to contract by the gross. The eye was hurt by naked red angles, by the raw green of the blinds, and the similarity of each proportion. Some few of the doorways, but very few, were adorned with stucco porches and iron railings; generally a woman sat under a black beam, and screamed down a dark passage after a child.

Kate's anxiety of mind caused her to walk fast towards the square of sky, where the passers seemed like figures on the top of a monument. There she would turn to the left, and descend towards the little quasi villa residences which form the suburb of Northwood; and when, ten minutes later, hot, and out of breath, Kate approached Mrs.

Barnes's door, she matured her plans, determining if the worst came to the worst to let the dress go at a reduction. For the moment she had forgotten her other troubles, and it was not until she had received her money that she remembered that her rooms would again be empty.

She was sorry Mr. Lennox was going. She did not think how rudely he had turned her out of his room; she dwelt rather on his kindness when she brought him up his breakfast, and the nice pleasant way he had of speaking. A dim feeling of unexplained tenderness grew upon her mysteriously as mists gather along a low shore, and almost unconsciously she gazed upon the view before her. She slipped years back into the past, until she stood again a young girl on the playground of her youth, watching the rolling hills spreading up and along the sky-line.

Below her, in the dazzling morning light, lay a valley miles upon miles in length. It was one of those terrible cauldrons in which man melts and moulds this huge age of iron. And of what did this valley consist Of black plains that the sunlight could not change in color; of patches of grass, hard and metallic in hue; of tanks of water glittering like blades of steel; of gigantic smoke-clouds rolling over the stems of a thousand factory chimneys. Like the bayonets of an advancing army they came, encircling Bucknell, a single oasis in this black desert, through whose woods curled constantly the white steam of a passing train.

Kate stood on the side of a steep declivity. Through its worn sides black cinders protruded, and the ruins of deserted collieries stood close at hand. On her left, some fifty feet below, running in the shape of a fan round a belt of green, were the roofs of Northwood—a river of black brick unrelieved by any trace of color saving the yellow chimney-tops that were speckled upon a line of fluffy clouds. Sharp as the teeth of a double saw were the interminable gables, and not ray of light glinted against the black windows. So black was everything that even the spire of the church remained a silhouette in the liquid sunlight that was poured as out of a diamond vase from the long pale space of sky which rose behind the hills of Western Coyney. On the

right, Southwark, another river of brick, trickled down into the valley, but this time the color was red. There the lines were more irregular, and the jagged houses seemed like cartloads of gigantic pill-boxes cast in a hurry from the counter along the floor. The lines of the pavement could just be distinguished. Kate watched the crowds passing. A hansom with a white horse appeared and disappeared amid these angular streets, sometimes seen against the green blinds of a semi-detached villa, sometimes against the broad background of a group of pottery ovens basking with their yellow bellies raised up to the light.

The sun was now rapidly approaching the meridian, and the kingstar blazed, a vision of dancing flame; white clouds trimmed the edges of the long hills, and in the vibrating light the wheels of the most distant collieries could almost be counted, and the stems of the far-off factory chimneys appeared like tiny fingers.

Kate saw with the eyes and heard with the ears of her youth, and the past became as clear as the landscape before her. She remembered the days when she came to read on this hillside. The titles of the books rose up in her mind, and she could recall the sorrow she felt for the heroes and heroines. It seemed to her strange that that time was so long past, and she wondered why she had forgotten it. Now it all seemed so near to her that she felt like one only just awakened from a dream. And these memories made her happy. She took an infinite pleasure in recalling every little event—an excursion she made when she was quite a little girl to the ruined colliery, and, later on, a conversation with a chance acquaintance, a young man who had stopped to speak to her.

At the bottom of the valley, right before her eyes, the white gables of Bucknell Rectory, hidden amid masses of trees, glittered now and then in an entangled beam that flickered between chimneys, across brick-banked squares of water darkened by brick walls. Then behind Bucknell were more desolate plains full of pits, brick, and smoke; and then for miles rose up against the sky, with a roll oceanic in gradeur, the interminable hills.

The American tariff had not yet come into operation,

and every wheel was turning, every oven baking; and through a drifting veil of smoke the sloping sides of the hills with all their fields could be seen sleeping under immense covertures of shadow, or basking naked upon beds of light. A deluge of rays fell upon them, defining every angle of Watley Rocks, and floating over the grasslands of Standon until all was lost in a huge embrasure filled with the almost imperceptible outlines of the Wever Hills. For, like a reversed teacup placed in a basin is the mound on which the red town of Hanley is built; and the intersecting lines, squares, and oblongs of the hill-fields render the likeness more apparent, representing as they do a pattern similar to the painted edging of a Staffordshire basin.

And these vast slopes, which formed the background of every street, were the theatre of all Kate's travels; and before life's struggles had ground her down she never saw them without dreaming. When as a little girl she played about the black cinders of the hillside she used to stop to watch the sunlight flash along the far-away green spaces, and in her thougths connected them with the marvels she had read of in her books of fairy tales. Surely beyond these wonderful hills were the palaces of the kings and queens, who could wave their wands and vanish? Then a few years later it was there, or beyond those slopes, that the lovers lived with whom she sympathized in the pages of her novels.

She had not been where she now stood for months, and under the influence of all her new-found emotions she wondered why she had never thought before of revisiting these old places. For, sudden as the splash of a stone dropped into a well, the knoweldge came to her that she was no longer happy, that her life was no more than a burden, a misery. But the analysis of her thoughts is difficult, so rapid, so contradictory were they. A hundred different things occurred to her at once. Above all, she remembered her marriage, and how Mrs. Ede had persuaded her into it, and for the first time she blamed the old woman for her interference. But this was not all. Kate was willing to admit that there was no one she loved like Mr. Ede, but still it was hard to live with a mother-in-law who had

a finger in everything and used the house like her own. It would be all very well if she were not so very obstinate —if she were not so very certain that she was always right. Religion was very well, but that perpetual "I'm a Christian woman," was sickening. No wonder Mr. Lennox couldn't stand it. Poor man, why should he not have a few friends up in the evening? The lodgings were his own while he paid for them. She blamed herself bitterly for having insulted the man in his rooms, and before his friends. No wonder he cut up rough; no wonder he was leaving them. If so she would never see him again. The thought caught her like a pain in the throat, and with a sudden instinct she turned to hurry home. As she did so her eyes fell on Mr. Lennox; he was walking towards her. At such an unexpected realization of her thoughts she uttered a little cry of surprise; but, smiling affably, and in no way disconcerted, he raised his big hat from his head. On account of the softness of the felt this could only be accomplished by passing the arm over the head and seizing the crown as a conjuror would a pocket-handkerchief. The movement was large and unctuous, and it impressed Kate considerably.

"I took the liberty to stop, for you seemed so interested that I felt curious to know what could be worth looking at in those horrid chimneys and mounds of cinders."

"I was not looking at the factories, but at the hills. The view from here is considered very fine. Don't you think so, sir?" she asked, feeling afraid that she had made some mistake.

"Ah, well, now you mention it, perhaps it is. How far away, and yet how distinct! They look like the gallery of a theatre. We're on the stage, the footlights run round here, and the valley is the pit; and there are plenty of pits in it," he added laughing. "But I mustn't speak to you of the theatre."

"Oh, I'm sure I don't mind! I'm very fond of the theatre," said Kate hastily.

This indirect allusion to last night brought the conversation to a close, and for some moments they stood looking vacantly at the landscape. Overhead the sky was one

serene sheet of dazzling blue, and so still was the air that the smoke-clouds trailed like the wings of gigantic birds slowly balancing themselves. Waves of white light rolled up the valley as if jealous of the red, flashing furnaces. An odor of iron and cinders poisoned the melting air, and rose through it from the black gulf below like intestine exhalations from the open belly of a lately slaughtered animal. After some moments of contemplation, which seemed to draw them closer together, Mr. Lennox said,

"There is no doubt but the view is very grand, but it is tantalizing to have those hills before your eyes when you are shut up in red brick oven. How fresh and cool they look! What wouldn't you give to be straying about in those fresh woods far away?"

Kate looked at Mr. Lennox with ravished eyes; his words had flooded her mind with a thousand forgotten dreams. She felt she liked him better for what he had said, and she murmured as if half ashamed—

"I was never out of Hanley. I never saw the sea, and when I was a child I used to fancy that the fairies lived beyond those hills; even now I can't help imagining that the world is quite different over there. Here it is all brick, but in novels they never speak of anything but gardens and fields."

"Never seen the sea? Well there isn't much to *see* in it," said Mr. Lennox laughing at the pun. "When you were a little girl you used to come here to play, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir; I was born over there in one of those cottages."

Mr. Lennox did not seem to know whether to look sorry or sentimental, but he listened patiently to Kate who, proud of being able to show him anything, pointed out the different points of view. The white gables that could just be distinguished in the large dark masses of trees, the one oasis in the ocean of cinders, was Bucknell Rectory. The fragment of the cliff on the top of the highest ridge halfway up the sky was Watley Rocks; then came Western Coyney, the plains of Standon, and far away, in a blue mist, the faint outlines of the Wever Hills. But Mr. Lennox did not seem very much interested; the sun was too hot for him, and in the first pause of the conversation he asked

Kate which way she was going. He had to get on to the theatre, and he asked her if she would show him the way there.

"You can't do better than to go down Market Street; but if you like I will direct you."

"I shall be so glad if you will; but Market Street—I think you said Market Street? That is just the way I have come."

Market Street was where people connected with the theatre generally lived, and Kate knew at once he had been there looking for lodgings; but she was ashamed to tax him with it, and they walked on for some time without speaking. But every moment the silence became more irritating, and at last, determined to know the worst, she said, "I suppose you were looking for lodgings; all the theatre people put up in that street."

Mr. Lennox flinched before this direct question.

"Why no, not exactly; I was calling on some friends; but there are, as you say, some of the profession living in the street; and now you mention it, I suppose I shall have to find some new diggings."

"I am sorry, sir, very sorry," said Kate looking up into the big blue eyes. "I ought not to have come down; you are, of course, master in your own rooms."

"Oh, it was not your fault; I could live with you forever. You mustn't think I want to change, if you could only guarantee that your mother-in-law will keep out of my way."

Kate felt at that moment that she would guarantee anything that would prevent Mr. Lennox from leaving her house.

"Oh, I don't think there will be any difficulty about that," she said eagerly. "I'll bring your breakfast and dinner up, and you are out nearly all day."

"Very well, then, and I will promise not to bring home any friends," he added gallantly.

"But I'm afraid you'll be very lonely, sir."

"I'll have you to talk to sometimes."

Kate made no answer, but they both felt that the words implied more than they actually meant, and like people

who had come to some important conclusion, they remained silent. Then after a long pause, and without any transition, Mr. Lennox spoke of the heat of the weather, and of the harm it was likely to do their business at the theatre. She asked him what he thought of Hanley. Mr. Lennox smiled through his white moustache, and said the want of trees made it very dreary; he cared little for the country, but to see nothing but brick made it hard for the eyes.

Not feeling quite satisfied with this last observation, Kate spoke of the pretty sites there were about the town, and pointing down a red perspective backed by the usual hills, she told him that Trentham, the Duke of Sutherland's place, was over there.

"What, over those hills? That must be miles away."

"Oh, not so far as that. Hanley does not reach to there. The country is perfectly beautiful, once you get past Stoke. I went once to see the Duke's place, and we had tea in the inn. That was the only time I was ever really in the country, and even then we were never quite out of sight of the factories. Still, it was very nice."

"And who were you with?"

"Oh, with my husband."

"He's an invalid, is he not?"

"Well, he suffers very much at times, I'm afraid; but he's often well enough."

The conversation again came to a pause, and both thought of how happy they would be were they taking tea together at the inn at Trentham.

They were now in the centre of the town, close to the Town Hall—a stupid square building, staring as an official document. Two black cannons stood on either side of the door. Opposite was a huge shop with "Commercial House" written across the second story in gold letters. Vulgar carpets and coarse goods were piled about the doorway; and from these two houses Piccadilly, and Broad Street, its continuation, ran down an incline, and Church Street branched off, giving the town the appearance of a two-pronged fork.

All was red—generally red brick turning to purple, and it blazed under a blank blue sky. No spray of green re-

lieved the implacable perspectives, no æsthetic intention broke the frigidity of the remorseless angles. Wide widths of red walls, bald rotundities of pottery ovens, iron, and brick, reigned supreme; before them nature had disappeared, and the shrill scream of the steam-tram as it rolled solemnly up the incline seemed to be man's cry of triumph over vanquished nature.

After looking vacantly about him, Mr. Lennox said, "What I object to in the town is that there's nothing to do. And it is so blazing hot; for goodness sake let us get under the shadow of a wall."

Kate smiled, and as they crossed over they both wiped their faces.

"There are the potteries," she said, referring to Mr. Lennox's complaint that there was nothing to do in the town. "Everybody that comes to Hanley goes to see them; but the best are in Stoke."

"I am sure I'm not going to Stoke to see potteries," he answered decisively, "but if there are any in Hanley I daresay I shall turn in some afternoon. I have heard some of our people say they are worth seeing. But," he added, as if a sudden thought had struck him, "I might go now; I have nothing to do for the next couple of hours. How far are the nearest?"

Kate told him that Powell and Jones's works were close by in the High Street. She pointed out the way, but failing to make Mr. Lennox understand her, she consented to go with him. Mr. Lennox pleaded complete ignorance. From the word pottery he guessed that it had something to do with pots and pans. He had a kind, soft manner of speaking, which drew her towards him as irresistibly as if he had taken her in his arms, and it was astonishing how intimate they had grown in the last few minutes.

"It doesn't look very interesting," he said, as they stopped before an archway and looked into a yard filled with straw and packing-cases.

"Oh, yes, it is; but you must see the different rooms. You must go up to the office and ask for a permission to see the works."

"Oh, I don't think I'd care to go by myself. Won't you come with me?"

Kate hesitated, for suddenly a desire to see the old places had crept into her mind. She had very little to do at home; she could say that Mrs. Barnes had kept her waiting.

"Do come," he said after a pause during which he looked at her eagerly.

"Well, I should like to see the room where my mother used to work, but we mustn't stop too long. I shall be missed at home." The matter being so arranged they entered the yard, and Kate pointed out a rough staircase placed against the wall. "You must go up there, the office is at the top; ask for a permission to see the works. I'll wait for you here."

For the moment she was glad to be left alone, and she looked round the old brick yard with tenderness. Half-a-dozen men were packing crockery into crates with spades. She watched them wondering how it was they did not break the delf. She saw herself again a little girl running with her mother's dinner just as she used to ten years ago.

One afternoon she remembered particularly well. Promising to be very good, she had been allowed to sit by her mother and watch her painting flowers that wound in and out and all about a big blue vase. She remembered how she was reproved for peeping over her neighbor's shoulder, and how proud she felt sitting among all the workwomen. She could recall the smell of the paint and turpentine, and her bitter grief when she was told that she should not learn painting, that she was too delicate, and was going to be put out to dressmaking. But now that time was gone; her mother was dead and she was married. Everything was changed or broken, as was probably that beautiful vase. It astonished Kate to find herself thinking of these things. She had passed the High Street twenty times within the last six months without it even occurring to her to visit the old places, and when Mr. Lennox came back he noticed that there were tears in her eyes. He made no remark, but hastily explained that he had been told that there was a party just that minute gone on in front of them and they were to catch them up.

"This way, then," she said, pointing to a big archway.

"Oh, I can't run; don't be in such a hurry," said Mr. Lennox panting.

Kate laughed and admitted that the heat was terrific. Out of a sky burnt almost to white the huge glare descended into the narrow brick yards. The packing straw seemed ready to catch fire; the heaps of wet clay, which two boys were shovelling, smoked, emitting as it did so an unpleasant wet odor. On passing the archway they caught sight of three black frock coats and three black shovel hats.

"Oh!" said Kate, stopping disappointed, "we'll have to go the round with those clergymen."

"What does that matter? It will be amusing to listen to them."

"But mother knows all of them."

"Oh, nonsense; they must be strangers in the town or they wouldn't be visiting the potteries."

This reassured Kate, and they joined the party. The Dissenting clergymen looked askance at Mr. Lennox, and the guide said, as he showed them into a small white cell, "You are in plenty of time, sir; these are the snagger makers."

Two men were beating a heap of wet clay in order to insure a something in the bakery which nobody understood, but which the guide took some trouble to explain. The clergymen clustered forward to listen. Mr. Lennox wiped his face, and they were then hurried into a second cell, where unbaked dishes were piled all around upon shelves. It was said to be the dishmakers' place, and was followed by another and another room, all, Mr. Lennox thought, equally hot and uninteresting. He strove to escape from the guide, who drew him through the line of clergymen and remorselessly explained to him the mysteries of earthenware.

At last these preliminary departments were disposed of, and they were led to another part of the works. On their way thither they passed the ovens. These were scattered over the ground like bee-hives in a garden. Mr. Lennox patted their round sides approvingly, and for the first time showed some signs of interest. He said they reminded him

of oyster boys in a pantomime, and he declared it would not be a bad feature to introduce into the next Christmas show. Kate looked wonderingly at her friend. She could not understand how he could think of such things, and the clergymen murmured among themselves.

After this little adventure the party seemed to grow more united, and in the printing-room they listened to all that was said. The guide was remarkably discursive, and apparently considered it of the highest importance that clergymen, actor, and dressmaker should understand the different processes the earthenware had to pass through before it was placed on toilet or breakfast table.

They were now in a long lobby with big rafters overhead. Smoking flannels hung on lines all around, and the sunlight poured through the white skylights. Like laundresses at their tubs, four or five women washed the printed paper from the plates. In one corner a man in a paper cap was bending over a stove; he plastered hot brown stuff over metal plates, and, apparently dissatisfied with the guide's explanation of his work, he broke out into a voluminous flow of technical details, which even the clergymen failed to follow. At the other end of this vast workroom there was a line of young girls who cut the printed matter out of sheets of paper with marvellous dexterity. The scissors ran in and out of flowers, tendrils, and little birds without ever injuring one. Delighted, the clergymen watch the process, while Mr. Lennox got behind Kate and whispered how he had just caught the tall Dissenter winking at the dark girl on the right. The truth of this statement did not concern Mr. Lennox, for it gave him a pretext for breathing on Kate's neck, a lead up to the love-scene which he had now decided was to come off on the first occasion that should present itself. A devilish pretty woman, he thought, and he continued to make jokes at the expense of the three Dissenting ministers, who walked before them like three black turkeys.

Having passed through a brick alley with a staircase leading to a platform built like a ship's deck, they went on through a series of rooms until they came to a place almost as hot as a Turkish bath. Presses filled with unbaked

plates and dishes stood in the middle of the room, and the wet smell of the clay drying in steam diffused from underneath was very unpleasant. It caused one of the ministers to cough violently, whereupon the guide explained that the platemakers' apartments were considered the most unhealthy of any in the works; the people who worked there, he said, usually suffered from what is known as the potter's asthma. This interested Kate, and she delayed the guide with questions as to how the potter's asthma differed from the ordinary form of the disease, and when their little procession was again put in motion she told Mr. Lennox how her husband was affected, and the nights she had spent watching at his side. But although Mr. Lennox listened attentively she could not help thinking that he seemed rather glad than otherwise that her husband was an invalid. The unkind way in which he spoke of sick people shocked her, and she opposed the opinion that a person in bad health was a disgusting object.

She could not be brought to agree to this view. In discussing the question they lingered behind, and Mr. Lennox profited by the occasion to whisper into her ears that she was far too pretty a woman for an asthmatic husband; and, encouraged by her blushes, he even hazarded a few coarse jokes anent the poor husband's deficiencies. He wanted to know how a man could kiss if he couldn't breathe, for if there was a time when breath was essential, according to him, it was when four lips meet.

Kate felt frightened. No one had ever spoken to her in this way before, and she did not really know what Mr. Lennox meant. Had she known how to do so she would have resented his familiarities, but his good humour disarmed her. Once their hands met. The contact caused her a thrill, and she put aside the unbaked plate they were examining.

"We had better make haste," she said, "or we shall lose them."

The next two rooms were considered by everybody both amusing and instructive. Even the three clergymen lost something of their stolid manner, and spoke once or twice to Mr. Lennox. They asked him, apropos of nothing, his

opinion concerning the religious character of Hanley, and if he were of their persuasion.

"What is that?" asked Mr. Lennoy, affecting a comic innocence which he hoped would tickle Kate's fancy.

"Oh, we are Wesleyans," said the minister.

"And I'm an actor; but I beg your pardon, stage managing's more my business."

This remark, much to Mr. Lennox's satisfaction, seemed to thoroughly horrify the three black turkeys, and leaving them to make what they could of his reply, he cast a vicious ogle at Kate, and drew her confidentially forward to show her how jam-pots were made.

An old man sat straddle-legged on a high narrow table just on a line with the window. He was covered with clay; his forehead and beard were plastered with it. Before him was an iron plate, kept continually whirling by steam, which he could stop by a pressure of his foot. Holding a lump of clay with both hands, he squeezed it into a long shape not unlike a tall ice, then forcing it down into the shape of a batter-pudding he hallowed it. Round and round went the clay, the hands forming it, all the while cleaning and smoothing until it came out a true and perfect jam-pot, even to the little furrow round the top, which was given by a movement of the thumbs. He had been at work since seven in the morning, and the shelves round him were encumbered with the result of his labors. Every one marvelled at the old creature's dexterity until he was forgotten in the superior attractions of the succeeding room. This was the turning-house, and Mr. Lennox could not help laughing outright, so amusing did the scene appear to him. Women went dancing up and down on one leg, and at such regular intervals that they seemed absolutely like machines. They were at once the motive power and the feeders of the different lathes. It was they who handed the men lumps of dry clay, which they turned into shapes as wood might be. The strangeness of the spectacle gave rise to much comment. The clergymen were anxious to know if the constant jigging was injurious to health. Mr. Lennox inquired how much coin they made by their one-legged dancing, and he spoke in high terms of their good

looks. This led him easily into the question of morals, a subject in which he was much interested. He wanted to know if this crowding together of the sexes could be effected without danger. Surely cases of seduction must occur occasionally. In answering him the guide betrayed a certain reticence of manner which encouraged Mr. Lennox to harass him with inquiries. Did he really mean to say that nothing ever happened; that these young women who were working all day side by side with people of the other sex never, never thought of anything but their work? The word work indicated to the hotly pressed guide his way of escape, and he assured Mr. Lennox that there was no time to think of such nonsense in the factory, and anxious to vindicate the honor of the establishment, he declared with fervor that any who took the smallest liberty with any female would be instantly dismissed from the works. The ministers, although they seemed to think the subject might have been avoided, listened approvingly. Kate felt a little embarrassed, and Mr. Lennox watched a big blonde-haired woman who smiled as if quite ready, notwithstanding the ludicrous bobbing up and down position she was in, to get up a flirtation. But when Kate noticed this, with a courage that surprised herself, she cut the guide short by proposing that they should go on.

For in addition to the annoyance that the woman's impertinence caused her, she was beginning to feel uneasy at the time she had been away from home. She was sure that Mrs. Ede would be fretting all over the place, and she could well imagine how cross Ralph would be if he heard of it. She felt very sorry for the one, and a little resentful towards the other, but the sentimental desire to see the painting-room where her mother used to work prevailed, and with her heart full of recollections she followed the party to the ovens.

Their way hither led them around the building, and they passed through many workrooms. These were generally clean, airy spaces, with big rafters and whitewashed walls. Sometimes a bunch of violets, a book, or a newspaper lying on the table, suggested an absent owner, and a refined countenance was instinctively sought for in the different groups

of women. There was also a difference in the hats and shawls, and it was easy to tell which belonged to the young girls, which to the mothers of families. Everyone looked healthy and contented. All were, as Mr. Lennox continued to assert, nice-looking, and all worked industriously at their numberless employments, one of the most curious of which consisted in knocking the roughness off the finished earthenware.

A dozen women sat in a circle; above them and around them were piles of dinner-services of all kinds. Each held with one hand a piece of crockery on her knees, whilst with a chisel she chopped away at it as if it could not by any possibility be broken. In this warehouse the noise, as may easily be imagined, was bewildering.

Through this room and others, up and down many narrow staircases, the visiting party went, the guide leading, the three black clergymen following, Kate lingering behind with Mr. Lennox until they came to the ovens. The entrance was from an immense corridor, prolonged by shadow and divided down the middle by presses full of drying earthenware, the smell of which was not, however, as strong as in the platemakers' place, and the difference was noticed by the clergyman with the cough. He said he was not affected to nearly the same extent.

At long distances two open doors allowed a double stream of light to enter, and a loophole far away placed a square of white in the vague obscurity. The party of visitors had from time to time to give way to men who marched in single file carrying what seemed to be huge cheeses. The guide explained that within these were cups, saucers, bowls, and basins, and men mounted on ladders piled these yellow tubs up the walls of the ovens like honeycombs in a hive. They all had a peep up the huge interior, and then they visited the furnaces. These were set in the oven's inner shell, which made a narrow circular passage slanting inwards as it ascended like the neck of a champagne bottle. The fires glared furiously, and suggested many impious thoughts to Mr. Lennox. The three black turkeys made him think of devilled bones, and he proposed to ask if there were any warmer corners in hell. He had taken advantage of the

darkness to put his arm round Kate's waist. But the constant whispering in her ear, which had at first amused her, now irritated and annoyed her; other emotions filled her mind with a vague tumult, and she longed to be left to think in peace. She begged of him to keep quiet. Her heart beat with suspense, and as they crossed one of the yards she asked the guide if she could not go straight to the painting-room. He replied that there was a regular order to be observed, and insisted on marching them through two rooms, and fully explaining three or four more processes. Then after begging of them to be careful and hold the rail, he led them up a high rickety staircase. The warning caused Kate a thrill, for she remembered well the orders she used to receive. Every step of this staircase was a terror to her mother.

The room itself however proved a little disappointing. Things had been changed; the tables were not arranged in quite the same way, and these alterations deprived her of the emotions she had expected. Still it gave her a great deal of pleasure to point out to Mr. Lennox where her mother used to work.

But to find the exact spot was not by any means easy. There were upwards of a hundred young women sitting on benches, leaning over huge tables covered with unfinished pottery. Each held in her hand a plate, bowl, or vase, on which she executed some design. The clergymen showed more interest than they had hitherto done, and as they leaned to and fro examining the work, one of them discovered the something *Guardian*, a Wesleyan organ, on one of the tables, and hailing his fellows they all three hurriedly proceeded to interview the proprietor. But the guide said they had to visit the storerooms, and forced them away from their "lamb."

The storerooms were wildernesses of white. Ridges of vases, mounds of basins and jugs, terraces of plates, formed masses of sickly white, through which rays of light were caught and sent dancing with a blinding brilliancy. Along the wall on the left-hand side presses were overcharged with dusty tea-services. They were there as numerous as leaves in a forest. On the right were square gray windows, under

which the convex sides of salad-bowls, like gigantic snowballs, sparkled in the sun; and from rafter to rafter, in garlands and clusters like grapes, hung countless mugs, gilded, and bearing a device suitable for children. Down the middle of the floor a terrace was built of dinner-plates, the edges burnished with light, the rest being in gray tint.

Two rooms away a huge mound of chamber-pots formed an astonishing background, and against all this white effacement the men who stood on high ladders dusting the crockery came out like strange black climbing insects.

The clergymen said it was very interesting, and the guide explained, just as he did everything else, the system of storing employed by the firm; how the crockery was packed, and how the men would soon be working only three days a week on account of the American tariff. But he was not much listened to. Everyone was now tired, and the clergymen who since the discovery of the newspaper had been showing signs that they regarded their visit to the potteries as effected, pulled out their watches and whispered mysteriously that their time was up. It was vain to tell them that there were only a few more rooms to visit; they declared that they must be off, and demanded to be conducted to the door. This request was an embarrassing one. It was against the rules ever to leave visitors when going the rounds. The guide had, therefore, either to conduct the whole party to the door, or transgress his orders. After a slight hesitation, influenced no doubt by a conversation he had had with Mr. Lennox, in which mention was made of tickets for the theatre, he decided to take the responsibility on himself, and asked that gentleman if he would mind waiting a few minutes with his lady while the religious gentlemen were being shown the way out. Mr. Lennox assented with readiness to this arrangement, and the three black figures and the guide disappeared a moment after behind the bedroom utensils. After an anxious glance round, Mr. Lennox looked at Kate. As she gathered to herself all the remembrances that the place had evoked, her manner grew more and more abandoned. She knew the room she was in well. Through it she used to pass daily with her mother's dinner, and she remembered how in her

childhood she wondered how big the world must be to hold enough people to use such thousands of cups and saucers. All the half-forgotten fancies of infancy came trooping back to her in a succession as regular as the crockery on the wall. There used to be a blue tea-service in the far corner, and she remembered that it had been once her greatest ambition to possess it; she had often lingered to imagine a suitable parlor for it, then she used to see herself pouring out a dream husband's tea. There was a similar tea-service there now, but it was only the mocking ghost of the other. Little by little she remembered everything. One day she had torn her frock coming up the stairs, and was terribly scolded; another time Mr. Powell, attracted by her black curls, had stopped to speak to her, and he had given her as a present one of the children's mugs—one exactly like those hanging over her head. She had treasured it a long time, but it at last was broken. It seemed that all things belonging to her had to be broken; her dreams were made in crockery.

But as Kate looked into the past she became gradually conscious of a voice whispering to her.

At first her thoughts were so far away that the presence of the man next to her was only felt remotely, and his words, referring as they did to the charms of memory, did not for some time break the thread of her reverie. Seeing what was her mind's mood, Mr. Lennox strove to adapt himself to it.

"How strangely things do pass away; life is only a dream when we think of it. And how odd it is that you should never have thought of revisiting this place until you met me."

Commonplace as these words were, they caused Kate's soul to rise to her lips, and she lifted her eyes, liquid with love, to Mr. Lennox's. The look he considered as arriving quite apropos, for he felt that he could not manage another phrase like the last, and anxious to come to the point, he turned to see if they were watched. There was no one within twenty yards of them; where they were all was still. At their feet a pile of plates and teacups slept in

a broad flood of sunlight, and the boys on the high ladder dusted the mugs three rooms away.

"And what a pretty child you must have been. I can fancy you with your black hair falling about your shoulders. Had I known you then I should have taken you in my arms and kissed you. Do you think you would have liked me to have kissed you?" he said, laughing just a little coarsely, for sentiment was not his forte.

But Kate knew nothing of this, and so moved was she that she had neither the will nor the sensation of what she did. She raised her eyes again, and a vague feeling of how nice, how kind he was, rushed through her.

Perceiving his advantage, Mr. Lennox affected to examine a ring on her finger. The warm pressure of his hand caused her to start, and she would have put him from her, but his voice calmed her.

"Ah!" he said, "had I known you then, I should have been awfully in love with you."

Kate closed her eyes, and for a moment abandoned herself to an ineffable sentiment of weakness and ravishment; and then imagining that it was all right, Mr. Lennox took her in his arms and kissed her rudely and lasciviously.

But at the first movement of his arms, at the first contact of his lips, quick, angry thoughts rushed to her head, and obeying an impulse in contradiction to her desire she cast him off.

"Oh, what a shame! what right had he? what a beast!" were the words that occurred to her; and shaking herself free, she looked at him, vexed and humiliated.

This unexpected rebuff seemed to mortify Mr. Lennox not a little, and he attempted to soothe Kate by a little jocularity.

"Oh! how very cross we are; and about a kiss, just a tiny, wee kiss."

Kate did not answer. She stood staring at him, only half hearing what he said, and irritated against him and herself. The substance of her thoughts was a painful regret that he had thus brutally disturbed the calm depth of happiness which she had been enjoying.

"I'm sure I didn't mean to offend you," he continued

after a pause, for Kate's manner puzzled him; "I love you too well."

"Love me?" she cried, astonished, but with nevertheless a tone of interrogation in her voice. "Why, you never saw me till the other day."

"I loved you the first moment—I assure you I did."

Kate looked at him softly, as imploring of him not to deceive her. There was in his big blue eyes an honest frankness, and his face said as clearly as words, "I think you a deuced pretty woman, and I'm sure I could love you very much," and recognizing this Kate remained silent.

Thus encouraged, Mr. Lennox attempted to renew his intentions. But actions have to be prefaced by words, and he commenced by declaring as passionately as he could. "That when a man would give the whole world for a kiss, it was not to be expected that—"

Here words began to fail him, and he strove to think of the famous love scene in *The Lady of Lyons*. But it was years since he had played the part, and he could only murmur something about reading no books but lovers' books, singing no songs but lovers' songs. Further he could not get, and remembering that the guide would be back in a few minutes, and inspired by Kate's pale face, he came to the conclusion that it would be absurd to let her go without kissing her properly.

He was a strong man, but Kate had now really lost her temper, and determined that he should not gain his end, she struggled vigorously. He had taken her in his arms, but she writhed with determination, and tried to tear his face. Three times his lips had rested on her cheek, once he had kissed her chin, but as he attempted to close her mouth she managed to twist her face away. It was certainly difficult to hold her, and in his excitement, not liking to be beaten, he lost sight of everything but the immediate end in view. Kate, too, had sworn to herself that he should not get her lips, and she fought with the tenacity of a bulldog. Staggering backwards, she placed one hand on his throat, and with the other strove to catch at his moustache; she had given it a wrench that had brought tears into his eyes, but now he was pinioning her, and she could feel his

breath upon her cheek, and see his big face approaching. Summoning up all her strength she strove to get away, but that moment, happening to tread on her skirt, her feet slipped. He made a desperate effort to sustain her, but her legs had gone between his, and a fall was imminent.

The crash was tremendous. A pile of plates three feet high was sent spinning, a row of salad-bowls was kicked over, and then with a heavy stagger Mr. Lennox went over and into a dinner-service, the soup-tureen of which rolled gravely into the next room.

In an instant half-a-dozen people were around them. A feeling at first prevailed that some serious accident had happened, but when Kate rose pale and trembling from the *débris* of a bedroom set, and Mr. Lennox was lifted out of the dinner-service with nothing apparently worse than a cut hand, there was heard a murmur of voices asking the cause of the disaster. But before a word could be said the guide came running towards them. He declared that he would lose his place, and spoke vaguely to those around him of the necessity of suppressing the fact that he had left visitors alone in the storerooms.

Mr. Lennox, on the other hand, was very silent. He had evidently received some bad cuts of which he did not speak. He put his hand to his legs and felt them doubtfully. There was a large gash in his right hand, from which he picked a piece of delf, and as he tied the wound up with a pocket-handkerchief he partly quieted the expostulating guide by assuring him that everything would be paid for. Then, taking Kate's arm, he hobbled out of the place.

The suddenness and excitement of the accident had for the moment quenched her angry feelings, and now, overwhelmed with pity for the poor wounded hand, she thought of nothing but getting him to a doctor. Indeed, it was not until she heard him telling Mr. Powell in the office that he was subject to fits, and that in striving to hold him up the lady had fallen too, that she remembered how he had behaved, how he had disgraced her. But her mouth was closed, and she listened in mute amazement to him as he invented detail after detail with surprising dexterity. He did not even hesitate to call in the evidence of the guide,

who in his own interests, was obliged to assent; and when Mr. Powell inquired after the three clergymen, Mr. Lennox at once declared that they had left them in the yard after visiting the ovens. To Kate, who from her childhood had lived between lines so narrow that a lie was almost an impossibility, this wreath of falsehood was positively bewildering; and so ingeniously did Mr. Lennox dovetail his statements that in her astonishment for his ingenuity, and gratitude for getting her out of the difficulty, she almost forgave him his wrongdoings.

Mr. Powell was very kind; he listened with a look of pity on his face, told an anecdote of a poor brother of his who was likewise subject to fits, and possibly influenced by the remembrance, refused to receive any remuneration for the broken crockery. In a firm like theirs a few plates more or less was of no importance.

This being settled, Mr. Lennox inquired the way to the doctor's and hobbled away, leaving a little pool of blood on the floor of the office. He looked very pale, and Kate feared that he was going to faint. She had to lend him her handkerchief—his was now saturated—to tie round his hand, and he confessed to her that he had got a bad cut in the leg, and could feel the blood trickling down into his boot.

"I must get off now, my dear; a bit of sticking-plaster is all I want. What a crash there was; I shall never forget it."

"Oh, yes, it was terrible; but do go at once," said Kate, laying her hands on his arm. "Oh, do let me send for a carriage." It was astonishing how intimate the accident had rendered them. As they spoke in the street a passer-by would have taken them for husband and wife.

"It isn't worth while; I'll be round at the doctor's in a minute. They tell me there is one round the corner in Church Street. Which is the way?"

"Oh, take the first turn to the right, and you are in it; but do go."

"I assure you it is nothing; I'll be able to go on to-night; I'll make a bit of effect out of my limp. But how strong you are; you're like a lion. But you mustn't struggle like that next time."

At the suggestion that there was going to be a next time, Kate's face clouded, but she was so alarmed for his safety that it was only momentarily. She had hardly noticed that he called her "dear." He used the word so naturally and simply that it touched her with swift pleasure, and was as soon lost in a crowd of conflicting emotions.

The man was coarse, large, sensual, even as is a mutton chop. But each movement of his fat hands was protective, every word he uttered was kind, the very intonation of his voice was comforting. He was in a word, human, and this attracted all that was human in you. The intelligence counted for nothing; his charm lay in his humanity.

CHAPTER V.

ON leaving Mr. Lennox, Kate walked slowly along the streets, trying vainly to arrange her thoughts, striving to arrive at a distinct notion of what had happened. But the events of the day were so utterly outside her experience that she could form no just conception of what they foreshadowed, of what they would bring. She was conscious only of a huge blotting out and a misty sensation of present happiness.

Interested vaguely in everything, she basked in the warmth of her thoughts like a beggar in the sun. Things she had seen a thousand times before struck her in a peculiarly new light. A pair of dummy spectacles over an optician's shop caused her to smile; she could not but help thinking that they were hardly too large for Mr. Lennox's eyes. A flock of pigeons strutting between the legs of some cab-horses awoke emotions which she could not explain. An extraordinary curiosity seemed to have been suddenly developed in her. She wondered who were the people who passed her in the streets, where they were going, what were their occupations. Her thoughts, generally so shadowy, were concentrated, and took an active and minute notice of the most trivial things. The whole attitude of her mind was changed. Three hours ago she gazed at the wide hills and dreamed of the earliest years of her life; now her thoughts did not rove beyond the present hour. Subjectively, nothing was clear; a veil hung, as it were, between her and herself; objectively, everything was distinct as if seen in a crystal. She could recall each word he said, could feel his breath on her cheek; see his blue eyes looking into hers; but they no longer frightened her. She dreamed of them placidly and with a strange lucidity. Being a child of the people, his brutality had not impressed itself on her, and every now and then she murmured to herself, "Poor fellow, what a fall he had; I hope he didn't hurt himself."

The shock she had received had acted upon her like a strong spirit. By turns she thought of things totally different—of Miss Hender, of the little girls, who would regret her absence from the workroom. Their affection was very dear to her, and she now suddenly wished they were her own children. The wish was only momentary, but it was the first time the desire for motherhood had ever troubled her.

It amused her to think of their smiling faces, and to make sure of their smiles she entered a shop and bought a small packet of sweet-stuff, and with the paper in her hand continued her walk home. The cheap prints in a newspaper shop delayed her, and the workmen who were tearing up the road forced her to consider how a suspension of traffic would interfere with her business. She was now in Broad Street; and when she raised her eyes she saw her own house. It was quite a new building. High and narrow, it stood in the main street at the corner of a lane, and so much was it a corner house that the curve of the pavement exactly echoed the arch of the doorway. The ground-floor windows were completely curtained by light goods; men's shirts hung four on a wire, underneath were some black hats with feathers. There were also children's dresses, and a few print neckties trimmed with white lace.

As she entered the shop Mrs. Ede, who was in the front kitchen, cried, "Well, is that you, Kate? Where have you been? I waited dinner an hour for you; and how tired you look!"

In her present state of mind Mrs. Ede, with her loud questioning, was the last person Kate would have cared to meet.

"What is the matter, my dear; are you unwell? Shall I get you a glass of water?"

"Oh no, mother; I'm all right. Can't you see that I'm only very hot?"

"But where have you been to? I have waited dinner an hour for you. Why, it's past two o'clock!"

Kate did not know how to account for her absence from home. Words rose to her lips to tell Mrs. Ede to mind her own business; but the feeling that she had been doing

wrong turned her irritability to cowardice, and after a pause she answered, thinking of Mr. Lennox as she spoke, "Mrs. Barnes kept me waiting above an hour trying her dress on, and then I was so done up with night-watching and sewing that I thought I'd go for a walk."

Nothing Mrs. Ede dreaded so much as anything approaching to a quarrel with Kate. So at once, and in hurried words, she proceeded to assure her that she couldn't have done better; that a good long walk was just what was required to set her up. "The only thing is, my dear, you shouldn't remain out in such a sun as this; you might have got a sunstroke."

Kate wearily wiped her hot face, and without acknowledging the advice tendered, said abruptly, "Have you done any business to-day? Have many people been in the shop?"

"Well, yes, half-a-dozen or more; and I sold the rest of those aprons."

Then she proceeded to recount the different events of the morning. It was Mrs. White who had bought one of the aprons, and she had said that she had not seen the pattern before; a stranger had taken another; and Miss Sargent had called, and she wanted to know how much it would cost to make her blue dress.

"Oh! I know; she wants me to re-line the skirt and put new trimming on the body for seven and sixpence; we can do without her custom. And then?"

"And then—ah! I was forgetting—Mrs West came in to tell us that her friend Mrs. Wood, the bookseller's wife, you know, up the street, was going to be confined, and would want some baby-linen, and she recommended her here."

"Did you see nobody else?"

"Well, yes, a young man who bought half-a-dozen pocket-handkerchiefs. I let him have the half-dozen for four shillings; and I sold a pink necktie to one of the factory hands over the way."

"Why, mother, you have done a deal of business, and I'm glad about the baby-linen. We have a lot in stock, and it hasn't gone off well. I don't know Mrs. Wood,

but it was very kind of Mrs. West to recommend us; and Miss Hender, how has she been getting on with the skirt? You know I promised it by Friday? "

"Well, I must say she has been working very well; she was here at half-past eight, and she did not stop away above three-quarters of an hour for dinner."

"I am glad of that, for I was never so backward in my life with my work, what with Ralph being ill and Mr. ——"

Kate tried to stop herself. The conversation had so far been an agreeable one, and she did not wish to spoil it by alluding to a subject on which there was no likelihood of their agreeing.

But Mrs. Ede had anticipated the hated name of Lennox. Her face clouded instantly, and she said, "Yes, I wanted to talk to you about that. Mr. Lennox has not sent anyone to take away his things, and he did not even speak to me when I took him up his breakfast this morning."

For the last five years Kate had lived inertly, glad to shirk all responsibility, delighted to leave the control of the house in her mother-in-law's hands, contented to work hard without thinking of a result. But the quarrels that had preceded the arrival of Mr. Lennox had awakened her to a sense of her position, and this sentiment, now strengthened by her present liking for the man, determined her to assert her authority.

"I do not think that Mr. Lennox is leaving us," she said after a pause. "I thought it was arranged last night that he was to be told that he must not bring friends after eleven o'clock at night. When I see him I'll speak to him about it."

And resolved to take the situation at one stroke, Kate walked haughtily into the kitchen and sat down to her dinner. Mrs. Ede, although quite ready to make a profession of her opinion when the occasion offered, followed with a dog-like look of affection on her face; and though fearing to lose the advantage gained, Kate entered into an explanation with a view of soothing the old woman's feelings. This done she went upstairs to see Ralph, whom Mrs. Ede declared to be very much better. On passing

the workroom the door opened suddenly, and the bright faces of the little girls darted out.

"Oh! is that you, Mrs. Ede. How we have missed you all the morning," cried Annie joyously.

"And Miss Hender has been so busy that she has to get me to help her with the skirt, and I did a great long piece myself without a mistake. Did I not, Miss Hender?"

"I am going up to see my husband," said Kate smiling, "but I shall be down presently, and I have bought something for you."

"Oh! what is it?" cried Annie excitedly.

"You shall see presently."

Ralph was lying still in bed: he was propped up in his usual attitude, with his legs tucked under him. The room smelt very bad.

"Don't you think we might open something?" she said, as she sat down by the bedside; "and your sheets want changing, too."

"Oh, if you have only come in to turn everything upside down you might as well have stayed away."

"It is very unkind of you to speak like that, Ralph; you know that—"

"I know that very well, but leave me alone; don't you see I can't breathe?"

"I think you are better," said Kate, mollified by the excuse; "but wouldn't it do you good to change the air sometimes?"

"No, no; on the contrary, the great thing is not to change it. I don't notice any smell. It is only because you have come out of the street."

Accepting this explanation as a possible one, Kate examined her husband attentively. His face was a dead white, and his eyes were dark, hollow cavities. With a weak, trembling hand he pushed the thick hair off his forehead, and he spoke with difficulty and in a thin wheeze. There was no doubt, however, that he was better. The dreadful dyspnœa was fast leaving him, and when he had recovered from the prostration caused by it he would be well.

"I think the pills did me good last night," he said after

a pause; and then added, laughing as much as his breath would allow him, "and what a rage mother was in. But tell me, what were they doing downstairs? Were there any ladies there? I was too bad to think of anything."

"Yes, there were some of the ladies of the theatre there," said Kate severely; "but I don't think that mother had a right to kick up the row she did."

"And it just came in upon her prayers," said Ralph, smiling laboriously.

Although crossgrained and passionate, Mr. Ede was not always an unpleasant man. He had a sense of dry humor, and often, in sudden flashes of affection, the kind heart of his mother was recognizable.

"You mustn't laugh, Ralph," said Kate, looking aside, for the comic side of the question had suddenly dawned upon her.

Their hilarity was, however, of not long endurance. Poor Mr. Ede was seized with a violent fit of coughing, and when this was over he lay back exhausted. At last he said:

"But where have you been all day? We have been wondering what had become of you."

The question, although not put unkindly, caused Kate a feeling of annoyance. "One would think I had come back from a long journey," she said to herself. "It is just as Miss Hender says, if I'm out half an hour more than my time every one is, as they say, 'wondering what has become of me.'" Assuming, however, an air of indifference, she told him that Mrs. Barnes had kept her an immense while, and that she had gone for a walk.

"I'm glad of that," he said. "You wanted a walk after being shut up with me three nights running. And what a time you must have had of it! But tell me what you have been doing in the shop."

In brief phrases Kate, in pity for his foolish jealousy, made light of the morning sales, for to be ill while business had been brisk Mr. Ede regarded as the cruellest misfortune that could have happened to him.

"And you really did sell all the aprons? I knew they would go. I told you so, didn't I?" he said.

"You did, dear," said Kate, seeking to satisfy him; "but you must not talk so much; you'll make yourself bad again."

"But are you going?"

"I've been out so long that I have a lot to do; but I'll come back and see you in the evening."

"Well, then, kiss me before you go."

Kate bent her head, and as she did so the image of Mr. Lennox arose before her with a singular distinctness: she remembered how he had struggled to obtain what she was now giving as a matter of course. It appeared strange to her that it should be so: but she had always complied with the ordinances of the marriage state without passion or revolt. Now for the first time it disgusted her to kiss her husband, and she was glad to get away. But as she stepped into the passage she almost stood in Mr. Lennox's room. Never had the proximity of the two rooms struck her so forcibly before—one step took you across. The door was ajar, and, full of the natural sentiment that a woman feels in the room of a man she is interested in, and hoping that Mrs. Ede had not yet set everything straight, she walked in to assure herself. Slippers and boots lay about; the portmanteau yawned wide open, with some soiled shirts on the top; a pair of trousers trailed from a chair on the floor. Protesting against Mrs. Ede's negligence, Kate hung the trousers on the door, placed the slippers tidily by his bedside, and put away the dirty linen. But in doing so she could not refrain from casting a rapid glance at the contents of the portmanteau. There, stowed carelessly away, she saw many of the traces which follow those who frequent women's society. The duchess works a pair of slippers for her lover, and the chorus-girl does the same. The merchant's wife, as she holds the loved hand under the ledge of her box at the theatre, clasps the ring she has given; the rich widow opposite has a jewel-case in her pocket which will presently be sent round to the stage-door for the tenor, who is now thinking of his high B flat.

Under the dirty shirts Kate found a pair of slippers, a pin-cushion, and the inevitable ring. But there were other presents more characteristic of the man; there was

a bracelet, a scent bottle, and two pots of *pâté de foie gras* wrapped up in a lace-trimmed chemise. Kate examined everything, but without being able to adduce any conclusion beyond a vague surmise that Mr. Lennox lived in a world far beyond her reach. The *foie gras* suggested delicacy of living, the chemise immorality, the bottle of scent refinement of taste, the bracelet she could make nothing of. Prosaic and vulgar as were all these articles, in the dressmaker's imagination they became both poetized and purified. An infinite sadness, that she could not explain, rose up through her mind, and, staring vaguely at the pious exhortation hung on the wall, "Thou art my will, Thou art my hope," she thought of Mr. Lennox's wounded legs. This led her to consider the softness of his bed, and to wonder if she could do anything to make him more comfortable. It vexed her to see that he had chosen to use the basin-stand made out of a triangular board set in a corner, and not the proper one, where she had hung two clean towels; and it was not until at last, remembering what she had told the little girls, and how they would be expecting her, that she could make up her mind to tear herself away.

"What have you got for us?" said four red lips as Kate entered.

"Oh, you must guess," she replied, taking a chair, and bidding Miss Hender good-morning.

"An apple?" cried Annie.

"No."

"An orange?" cried Lizzie.

Kate shook her head, and at the sight of their bright looks she felt her spirits return to her.

"No, it is sweet-stuff."

"Brandy balls?"

"No."

"Toffy?"

"Yes; Annie has guessed right," said Kate, as she divided the toffy equally between the two.

"And do you get nothing for guessing right?" said Annie doubtfully.

"Oh, Annie! for shame! I didn't think you were greedy."

"I think it's I who should get the most," replied Lizzie in self-defence. "Had it not been for me Miss Hender would never have got through her skirt. I helped you famously, didn't I, Miss Hender?"

The assistant nodded an impatient assent and gazed at her mistress in avid curiosity. In Miss Hender's opinion the next best thing to doing wrong oneself was to know that some one else had been. But the children being present, she could only watch her employer's face, and strive to read there some sign of dissipation.

Unconscious of the scrutiny, Kate sat idly talking of the skirt that was finished. In watching the others working, the clicking of the needles sounded as sweet music in her ears, and, like one lying under green boughs, she abandoned herself to all sorts of soft and floating reveries. Not for years had she known what it was to drink her fill of rest; and her thoughts balanced on one side and then on the other as voluptuously as flowers, and hid themselves in the luxurious current of idleness which lapped loosely around her.

The afternoon passed charmingly, full of ease and pleasant quiet. Miss Hender told them how *Les Cloches* had gone last night; of Miss Leslie's spirited singing, of the cider song, of Joe Mortimer's splendid miser scene, of Bret's success in the barcarole. One would have thought, so eagerly did she speak of them, that she had herself received the applause she described. Kate listened dreamily, and the little girls sucked toffy, staring the while with interested eyes.

CHAPTER VI.

BUT neither that evening nor the next could Kate manage to see Mr. Lennox. On both occasions he came in very late, and what caused her nearly to despair was that he ordered no breakfast in the house, and was away before she was down. She tormented herself trying to find reasons for his absence, and it pained her to think that it might be because the breakfasts were not to his taste. It seemed to her strange, too, that when a man cared to walk about the potteries with a woman, and had talked as nicely as he had done to her, that he should not take the trouble to come and see her, if it was only to say good-morning; and in a thousand different ways did these thoughts turn, change, twist, torture, break and become united in Kate's brain, as she sat sewing opposite Miss Hender, in the workroom. This young woman had ceased talking about Mr. Lennox. She had made up her mind that there was something between the stage-manager and her employer, and it irritated her when Kate assured her that she had not seen him for the last two days. On her side, too, Kate was not very successful in the pursuit of information, for Miss Hender, determined to be avenged, said she had not noticed that Mr. Lennox limped in any way, whereas Mrs. Ede declared that his walk was almost that of a cripple.

This threw Kate into a fever of excitement, and inventing a fabulous excuse for early rising, she left her husband's room at seven o'clock next morning, and took up her post to wait for him in the kitchen. But this ruse was not successful. Mr. Lennox did not come down till ten, and at that moment she was serving a customer in the shop, and he darted out at the side door. Whether he had done this on purpose to avoid her, or whether it was the result of chance, Kate passed the morning in considering. She had hitherto succeeded in completely ignor-

ing their ridiculous fall amid the teacups, but the memory of it now surged up in her mind; and certain coarse details, which she had forgotten, continued to recur to her with a singular persistency, and deaf to Miss Hender's conversation, she sat sullenly sewing, hating even to go down to the shop to attend when Mrs. Ede called from below that there was a customer waiting.

About three o'clock Mrs. Ede's voice was heard.

"Kate, come down; there is someone in the shop."

Passing round the counter she found herself face to face with a well-dressed woman.

"I was recommended here by Mrs. West," the lady said, after a slight hesitation, "to buy a set of baby clothes."

"Is it for a new-born infant?" Kate asked, putting on her shop airs.

"Well, the baby is not born yet, but I hope it will soon be."

"Oh! I beg pardon," said Kate, casting a rapid glance in the direction of the lady's waist.

The baby clothes were kept in a box under the counter, and in a few moments Kate reappeared with a bundle of flannels.

"You will find these of the very best quality; if you will feel the warmth of this, ma'am," she said, spreading out something that looked like two large towels.

The lady seemed satisfied with the quality, but from her manner of examining the strings Kate judged she was at her first confinement, and with short phrases and quick movements proceeded to explain how the infant was to be laid in the middle, and how the tapes were to be tied across.

"And you will want a hood and cloak? We have some very nice ones at two pounds ten; but, perhaps, you would not like to give so much?"

Without replying to this question the lady asked to see the articles referred to, and then beneath the men's shirts, which hung just above their heads, the two women talked with many genuine airs of mystery and covert subtlety. The lady spoke of her fears, of how much she wished the next fortnight was over, of her husband, of how long she

had been married. She was Mrs. Wood, the stationer's wife in Piccadilly. Kate said she knew her shop perfectly, and assumed a sad expression of countenance when in her turn she was asked if she had any children. On her replying in the negative, Mrs. Wood said, with a sigh of foreboding, "That people were possibly just as well without them."

It was at this unpropitious moment that Mr. Lennox entered. A quick expression of surprise passed over Kate's face, and she tried to sweep away and to hide up the things that were on the counter. Mrs. Wood was mildly embarrassed, and with a movement of retiring she attempted to resume the conversation.

"Very well, Mrs. Ede," she said, "I quite agree with you——and I will call again about those pocket-handkerchiefs."

But Kate, in her anxiety not to lose a chance of doing a bit of business, foolishly replied—

"Yes, but about those baby clothes—shall I send them, Mrs. Wood?"

Mrs. Wood murmured something inaudible in reply, and as she sidled and backed out of the shop she bumped against Mr. Lennox.

He apologized with ease, lifted his big hat, and strove to make way for her—a difficult matter, they both being large people. At last, by his getting into a corner, it became possible for the lady to pass, and when this feat, amid blushes and confusion, had been achieved, he took a step forwards, and leaning on the counter, said in a hurried voice:

"I have been waiting to see you for the last two days. Where have you been hiding yourself?"

The unexpected question disconcerted Kate, who, instead of answering him coldly and briefly as she had intended, said:

"Why, here; where did you expect me to be? But you have been out ever since," she added simply.

"It was not my fault—the business I have had to do. I was in London yesterday, and only got back last night in time for the show. There was talk of our boss drying up,

but I think it is all right. I'll tell you about that another time. I have an appointment now, and had only time to cut round here for a few minutes. I want you to come to the theatre to-morrow night. Here are some tickets for the centre circle. I'll come and sit with you when I get the curtain up, and we'll be able to talk."

The worm does not easily realize the life of the fly, and Kate did not understand. The rapidly stated facts whirled and bewildered her, and she could only say, in answer to his again repeated question,

"Oh, I should like it so much, but it is impossible; if my mother-in-law heard of it I don't know what she would say."

"Well, then, come to-night; but no, confound it, I shall be busy all to-night. Hayes, our acting manager, has been drunk for the last three days; he can't even make up the returns. No, no; you must come to-morrow night. Come with Miss Hender; she's one of the dressers. I'll make that all right; you can tell her so from me. Will you promise to come?"

"I should like it so much; but what excuse can I give for being out till half-past ten at night?"

"You needn't stay till then; you can leave before the piece is half over. Say you went out for a walk."

The most ingenious and complete fiction that Mr. Lennox's inventive brain might have worked out would not have appeased Kate's fears so completely as the simple suggestion of a walk, and as she remembered how successfully she had herself made use of the same excuse, her face lit up with a glow of intelligence.

"Then, you will come," he said, taking her look for an answer.

"I'll try," she replied, still hesitating.

"Then, that's all right," he murmured, pressing two or three pieces of paper into her hands, which he held for a moment affectionately in his. "You don't know how I have been thinking of you ever since; if you did, you would like me better than you do."

Kate smiled slowly, and a slight flush for a moment illuminated the pale olive complexion.

"I dreamt that we were going up to London together, and that your head was lying on my shoulder, and it was so nice and pleasant and when I woke up I was disappointed."

Kate shivered a little and drew back as if afraid; and in the pause which ensued Mr. Lennox remembered an appointment. "I must be off now," he said, "there's no help for it; but you won't disappoint, will you? The doors open at half-past six. If you are there early I may be able to see you before the piece begins."

With that, and a grand lift of the hat, the actor hurried away, leaving Kate to examine the three pieces of paper he had given her. With hesitating fingers she opened them. For the moment she was incapable of thought, and she could not fix her attention even sufficiently to read the large print that danced under her eyes. She remembered that he had told her many things; that he had been in London, and that he had thought of her, that he had asked her to meet him at the theatre to-morrow night, and that she had promised to do so. But in her mind all was still vague until it flashed across her mind that he had told her to confide in Miss Hender. Clearly it was impossible for her to go to the theatre without her assistant finding it out, therefore the best possible plan was to confide in Miss Hender.

There was a subtle persuasiveness in the thought of having someone to whom she could talk of Mr. Lennox when he went away. But, although of Miss Hender's secrecy she had no doubt, she was in no way disposed to let her know any more of her affairs than suited her purpose, and she excited and fevered herself thinking how she should approach the subject—how, in fact, she should lead her assistant into believing that it was the play and not Mr. Lennox that she (Kate), was interested in. She thought also how she should excuse herself when he came and sat by them during the performance. A thousand insinuations occurred to her, but for different reasons she abandoned them one after the other. Her ideas did not come to her smoothly, but with broken and jagged edges, and every now and then she would awake from her tortuous reverie

to see Miss Hender's bland and freckled face staring at her with a look of sensual and imbecile curiosity. At last, as if with sudden collapse, she lifted her head from her work and explained in the simplest words possible that she would like to go to the theatre. As she had expected, there was first a stare of sheer astonishment, and then a look of honest satisfaction spread from the fat chin to the crinkly hair, and at the risk, as she expressed it, of stalling her mistress off, she asked many questions. This was annoying, and Kate grew fretful. She wished to leave everything, the facts as well as her conception of them, in the vague; and when Miss Hender wanted to know if she was real spoons on the actor, she declared she would rather not go near the theatre at all if it made people suppose such things. Whereupon Miss Hender took a view less carnal, and in little brief phrases the two women discussed how the slip should be given to old Mrs. Ede. The idea of the walk was not approved of, it was too simple; but on this point Kate would take no advice, although she accepted the suggestion that she was to go upstairs, and under the pretext of changing her petticoat, should fold her hat into her mantle and tie the two behind her just as she would a bustle. This device was not without ingenuity, but Kate found it very difficult to put it into practice.

Mr. Ede was out of bed, and having been deprived of speech for more than a week his garrulity was excessive. He followed Kate into the back-room, driving her nearly distracted with questions about the shop, his health, his mother, and Mr. Lennox, whom he declared he was mighty anxious to see.

However, by a great deal of manœuvring, she managed to tie up and carry away unperceived the things she wanted. In doing all this she was certainly not free from certain twinges of conscience, and she felt humiliated at the quantity of falsehood such an innocent thing as spending an evening at the play seemed to entail. But the excitement kept her up and prevented her from thinking of anything but her promise to Mr. Lennox. Now that she came to think of it, she was prepared to admit that she had probably done wrong in promising; but it was done now, and could

not be undone. Besides, it couldn't much matter; he was going away to-morrow, and it was her only chance of seeing him again.

The time went slowly, but it went; and at five o'clock Mrs. Ede came up to say she was going up the town to do a little marketing for Sunday, and to ask Kate to come down to the front kitchen, where she could be in sight of the shop. Nothing, as Miss Hender said, could have happened more fortunately, and, with many instructions as to where they should meet, she hurried away. But she had no sooner gone than Kate grew dismally frightened, for it occurred to her that she was alone, and had no one to leave in charge of the shop. This was a terrible oversight, but after a few short mental struggles she resolved to turn the key in the door and leave her mother-in-law to come in by the side way. This was determined upon as she settled her hat before the toilette-glass that stood on the counter for the use of customers. The mantle gave her some uneasiness; it did not seem to hang well, and she examined herself with all those gracious turns and balancings of the hips and shoulders of a woman before a mirror. There was a twitch to be given to the skirt, and a fingering to be done at the necktie, and, after a second's hesitation, she decided that she would take a pair of gloves from the window. It was impossible to wear those that had been lying in her pocket for the last month. As she was pulling on a pair of gray thread with the calm air of satisfaction that prospective pleasure gives, she heard something stirring slowly behind her. With the rapidity of an inspiration, it struck her that her husband had come downstairs. Trembling, she waited for him to appear, and, wheezing loudly, he dragged himself through the doorway. Compared with the man she was going to see, he looked a miserable little chap. After drawing a deep breath or two, he said—

"What—do you look so fri—frightened at? You did—didn't expect to see me, did you?"

"No, I did not?" Kate answered as if in dream.

"Feeling a good deal better, I thou—ght I would come down, but—but the stairs—have tired me."

"So I see," said Kate, who was trying to think of an excuse; "but come into the kitchen and sit down on the sofa."

Mr. Ede walked with great difficulty, and it was some moments before he could speak again; at last he said:

"But where are you going?"

"I was thinking of taking a walk."

"You—you're always thinking of walking now." As far as the wheezing would allow it to appear, there was an intonation of reproach in this last remark, but Mr. Ede felt too exhausted to object definitely.

"I don't know that I am."

"Perhaps not; but if you are going out I'll mind the shop."

The shop was Mr. Ede's great love. It was there his life was centred. The counter was to him what a picture is to an artist, what a book is to an author, what a child is to its mother. Nothing put him in such good humor as when he himself had done a good day's business; nothing annoyed him so much as when Kate anticipated him in answering a call from the shop, and his anger was regulated in proportion to the purchases the customers had made; and to avoid being forestalled he would hang about the kitchen, fidgetting in and out, rearranging the articles exhibited in the window. These enthusiasms were often a positive source of loss, for as their business lay in articles peculiarly feminine, the presence of a man attending was not at all desirable; but Mr. Ede would not consider this side of the question, and, his head resting on his hand, he would remain over the counter slowly working out some commercial problem, picking the while a bad tooth with a hairpin taken from the drawers.

The present descent from his room had been influenced by mercantile ardor, for since Kate had told of the sale of the aprons and the order for the baby clothes, his mind had been harassed by visions of crowds of customers, and his ears deafened by a perpetual jingling of half-crowns; and, unable to endure torments so great any longer, he had come down to take possession of his well-beloved till. He was, therefore, in the hopes of a customer, not ill-pleased

at the prospect of getting rid of his wife. The complacency with which he had made his last remark had revealed the truth to Kate, and, her lips trembling with exultation, she said:

"You are sure you don't mind, dear; you are sure you are strong enough?"

"I'm all right. You go on."

Without waiting for anything further, Kate, with her heart in her mouth, hurried away. Her time was up, and fearing to miss Miss Hender, she raced along, dodging the passers with quick turns and twists. She was, as it were, blinded with the light and color of the theatre, which in imagination danced before her eyes, and she saw and heeded nobody until she suddenly heard someone calling after her, "Kate! Kate! Kate!" Pale with apprehension, she turned round and stood facing her mother-in-law.

"Where on earth are you going at that rate?" said Mrs. Ede, who carried a small basket on her arm.

"Only for a walk," Kate replied in a voice dry with enforced calmness.

"Oh, for a walk; I'm glad of that, it will do you good. But which way are you going?"

"Anywhere round about the town. Up on the hill, St. John's Road.'

"How curious, I was just thinking of going back that way. There's a fruiterer's shop where you can get potatoes a penny a stone cheaper than you can here."

If a thunderbolt had destroyed Hanley before her eyes at that moment, it would not have appeared to her of the importance that did this destruction of her evening's pleasure. A sort of deaf defiance of Mrs. Ede beat in her ears, and it was with the bitterest difficulty that she saved herself from saying straight out that she was going to the theatre to see Mr. Lennox, and had a right to do so if she pleased. Mastering her anger, however, with an effort she said:

"But I like walking fast; perhaps I walk too fast for you. Do not come."

"Oh, no, not at all. My old legs are as good as your young ones. Kate, dear, what is the matter? Are you

not all right?" she said, seeing how cross her daughter-in-law was looking.

"Oh yes, I'm all right, but you do bother one so."

This very injudicious phrase led to a demonstration of affection on the part of Mrs. Ede, and whatever were the chances of getting rid of her before, they were now reduced to nothing. Hurrying along by the young woman's side, she begged and besought, questioned and explained, until Kate felt that the top of her head was lifting off, that she was going mad. This continued up one street, down another. But Kate heard very little of what was said; her mind was too occupied in thinking how disappointed Mr. Lennox would be.

That evening about eleven o'clock, when Mr. Lennox's heavy, lolloping footstep was heard on the dark stairs, Kate stole out of her workroom to meet him. He saw her as he scraped a match on the wall; dropping it he put out his hands towards her.

"Is that you, dear," he said. "Why didn't you come to the theatre? We had a magnificent house."

"I couldn't; I met my mother-in-law."

The red embers of the match that had fallen on the floor now went out, and the indication of their faces was swept away in the darkness.

"Let me get a light, dear." The intonation of his voice as he said "dear" caused her an involuntary feeling of voluptuousness. She trembled as the vague outline of his big cheeks became clear in the red flame of the match which he held in his hollowed hands.

"Won't you come in?" she heard him say a moment after.

"No, I couldn't; I must go upstairs in a minute. I only came to tell you, for I didn't want you to go away angry; it was not my fault. I should so much have liked to have gone to the theatre."

"It was a pity you didn't come; I was waiting at the door for you. I could have sat by you the whole time."

Kate's heart died within her at thought of what she had lost, and after a long silence she said very mournfully:

"Perhaps when you come back another time I shall be able to go to the theatre."

"We've done so well here that we are going to get another date. I'll write and let you know?"

"Will you? And will you come back and lodge here?"

"Of course, and I hope that I sha'nt be so unlucky the next time as to fall down amid the crockery."

At this they both laughed, and the conversation came to a pause.

"I must bid you good night now."

"But won't you kiss me? Just a kiss, so that I may have something to think of you."

"Why do you want to kiss me? You have Miss Leslie to kiss."

"I never kissed Leslie; that's all nonsense, and I want to kiss you because I love you."

Kate made no answer, and following her into the heavy darkness that hung around the foot of the staircase he took her in his arms and glued his lips to hers. She at first made no resistance, but the passion of his kiss caused her a sudden revolt, and she struggled with him.

"Oh, Mr. Lennox, let me go, I beg of you," she said, speaking with her lips close to his. "Let me go, let me go; they will miss me."

Possibly fearing another fall, Mr. Lennox loosed his embrace, and she passed away from him.

CHAPTER VII.

ABOUT eleven o'clock, the morning after the kiss in the dark, Mr. Lennox was seen struggling with his luggage in the passage, and the whole family, including Mr. Ede, who was now almost re-established in health, had the pleasure of wishing him good-by. The little asthmatic, dressed out in his Sunday best—a threadbare black frock coat buttoned across his thin chest, a red necktie, an ill-fitting pair of gray trousers —came slowly down the stairs, followed by his wife and mother, whom he was taking to church. The fat actor took off his hat in his very largest manner to the ladies, and the bow was done so deferentially, and seemed to betoken so much respect for the sex, that even Mrs. Ede could not help thinking that Mr. Lennox was very polite. As for Kate, the sweep of the arm, the glistening of the teeth, the frizzly hair, the blue eyes, and the white hand, quite overcame her, and she bent her head partly in shame for the doings of last evening, partly to hide her sorrow at his leaving. But Mr. Lennox did not make the eyes at her that she feared he would; on the contrary, he occupied himself solely with her husband. Shaking hands with Mr. Ede, he asked him several questions about his asthma. Were there no cures for it? Did it not affect the health?

After his shop, the question that most interested Mr. Ede was his malady. He kept an account of his attacks very much as racing-men do of their horses, and when the subject was brought forward there was one celebrated attack which he would back against anything that had ever been known in the way of asthma. Mr. Lennox listened, oblivious to everything in the interest of this now five-year-old memory of a past shortness of breath, and it was not until Mrs. Ede suggested that they would be late for church that it occurred to him that his chance of catching

the eleven o'clock train was growing more and more remote. Then, with a hasty comment on his dilatoriness, he caught up a parcel and a rug and shook hands with them all.

With husband and wife he was equally sincere. His love and his pity were equally spontaneous, and he seemed to pass from one sentiment to the other without any intermediate transition of feeling.

However, he was off now. The cab rattled away, and Mr. Ede, walking very slowly between his womankind, proceeded up the red, silent streets towards the Wesleyan Church. After they had gone some twenty or thirty paces, Mr. Ede said,

"There's no doubt but that Mr. Lennox is a very nice man—a very nice man indeed; you must admit, mother, that you were wrong."

"He's polite if you will," replied Mrs. Ede, who for the last few minutes had been considering the ungodliness of travelling on Sunday.

"Oh, don't walk so fast," said Mr. Ede. "I must stop to get breath.'

"Well, then, we shall be late for church!"

At this a little color rose to his pallid cheeks, and, as far as his breath would allow, he abused his mother roundly. In his crossgrained disposition these sudden knots were of frequent occurrence, and then no words were too bitter or too hard for him to use. If she wanted to make him ill again she was going the right way about it. A nice thing it would be if he had to leave the church in the middle of one of the hymns! She did not remember when he had to be helped out during the sermon, and how very nice it looked. And if he had asthma, whose fault was it? She did not remember how she had not sent for the doctor when he caught the terrible cold, two years ago, until he was at death's door? Kate wisely refrained from joining in this discussion, and as she nourished a little rancor against Mrs. Ede for having prevented her from going to the theatre, there was an abstract and remote pleasure in hearing the old woman catch it, while she, Kate, lingered behind and dreamed

vaguely of the big man who was to come back to see her in three months' time. And during church time she experienced the most delicious emotions. The unison of the voices, the grandeur of the simple chants, united to the beauty of the words, awakened in her a vague but elevated sentiment of extraordinary joy—a joy that she had never experienced before; and in the fulness of it she sang loudly, vigorously, like a thrush in the balmy deeps of English woods on some May morning. Her voice, always strong and sweet, had never been heard to greater advantage, and it seemed to carry with it such a flavor of faith that Mrs. Ede could not but cast a glance of warm approval at her daughter-in-law. She was too excited to think whether she was wrong or right in loving Mr. Lennox. No such thought occurred to her, and when she sat down to listen to the sermon, it was only to pass into an ecstasy as delicious even as that which she had experienced during the singing. The voice of the preacher sounded as dimly as the sighing of the breeze in the ears of a dreamer who counts the petals of the flowers between him and the sun. Everything swayed before her in a mist; the heads of the congregation appeared like a dark sea, and the white walls were clear spaces deep, in her imagination, as the depths of the sky, where passed a multitude of infinitesimal sensations—words spoken, tender answers that gave place at once to pleadings and kisses, sensations like soft odors, desires as fragile as the tints of roses; things and places the most different flowed in and out of each other, producing a confused but harmonious vision of audible color and visible sound; and the constantly recurring phrase, "He will be back in three months," shed shuddering gleams of silver upon her dream as will a passing wind over a calm sea.

Her happiness was in herself, and almost lasciviously she yielded to the idleness of the day. During dinner she enjoyed herself immensely in sitting still and languidly listening to her husband and mother-in-law fighting over again the battle of the actor. Mr. Ede had now recovered his temper, and was prepared to maintain calmly his opinions regarding Mr. Lennox. He declared he, Mr. Ede, was just as good a Christian as his mother, and for

that very reason refused to judge a fellow Christian. She answered that she did not judge Mr. Lennox, but she had always been taught to believe that people who did not go to church led godless lives.

Sunday was kept strictly in this family. Three services were regularly attended. Kate, hoping to recover the sensations of the morning, attended church in the afternoon. But the whole place seemed changed. All her passion was gone. The cold, white walls chilled her, and the people about her appeared to her in a very small and miserable light. Unpleasant fancies, too, occurred to her, and she suffered from nervousness and irritability, even to the point of thinking she was ill. She was glad to get home, and after tea no entreaties could get her to leave the house. She longed to be left alone, and Mrs. Ede's fussing and arguing jarred terribly on her already excited feelings. Her thoughts had gone back to the book she had fallen asleep over last Sunday night when she sat by her husband's bedside, and when the house was quiet she went upstairs and fetched it. But after reading a few pages the heat of the house seemed to her intolerable. There was no place to go to for a walk except St. John's Road, and there turning listlessly over the pages of the old novel the time passed imperceptibly. It was like sitting on the sea-shore; the hills extended like an horizon, and as the sea-dreamer strives to pierce the long illimitable line of the wave and follows the path of the sailing ship, so did Kate gaze out of the sweeping green line that enclosed all she knew of the world, and strove to look beyond into the country to where her friend was going.

And the evening was superb. Northwood, with its hundreds of sharp roofs and windows, slept under pale salmon-colored tints, and the bells of its church sounded clearer and clearer at each peal. Warm breaths, soft as caresses, passed over the red roofs of Southwark, and below in the vast hollow of the valley all was still, all seemed abandoned as a desert; no whiff of white steam was blown from the collieries; no black cloud of smoke rolled from the factory chimneys, and they raised their tall stems like a suddenly dismantled forest to a wan, an almost colorless sky. The hills alone maintained their unchangeable aspect.

CHAPTER VIII.

HENCEFORTH Kate's character gradually underwent a change, or rather it seemed to be returning to what it originally was. With some modifications, all the salient points of her special temperament, which seven years of married life had effaced, returned just as the leaves do imperceptibly after the first breath of spring; and this metamorphosis was acomplished as silently as the alternations of the seasons. There was no internal struggle, no analysis of mind, no more consciousness of change than there is in the earth when she offers March the first daffodils. The living clay brought up her flowers as simply as the dead.

By the well-known ways, the dog comes back to his kennel, the sheep to the fold, the horse to the stable, and even so did Kate return to her sentimental self. One day as she was turning over the local paper, her eyes, suddenly obeying a long-forgotten instinct, wandered to the poetry column, and again, just as in old time, she was caught by the same simple sentiments of sadness and longing. She found there the usual song, in which *regret* rhymes to *forget*. The same dear questions which used to enchant seven years ago were again asked in the same naïve and childish fashion; and they touched her now as they had before. She refound all her old dreams; it seemed as if not a day had passed over her.

The hearts of the people change but little—if at all. When rude work and misery does not grind and trample all feeling out of them, they remain ever children in their sentiments, understanding only such simple emotions as correspond to their daily food. The contrary is seen in the woman of the world. At thirty she hates the man she loved at twenty; the books that charmed her when she was a girl she learns to regard as contemptible. Her taste changes; she requires as she goes on more subtle and com-

plex sensations, just as the epicure in his progress from one dish to another demands higher seasoning and stranger delicacies.

But in the woman of the people there is no intellectual advancement; she never learns to judge, to discriminate. What pleases her at one age does at another. Toil, if not sufficient to kill, preserves. The rich man changes, the peasant remains the same; and what is witnessable in centuries is witnessable in a single life. The years may freeze, but otherwise they do not alter a working woman's heart; and should a thaw come, the simple sentiments of her youth again burst into blossom. Her choice of books shows how little time has taught her. The same grotesque adventures enrapture her as they did before. She is as incapable at thirty as at twenty to distinguish between the false and the true;—apparently even less so, for if experience has influenced her taste at all, it has rendered it more childish and ignorant, and now more than before is her imagination the palpitating prey of the absurd fiction, and now more than ever does she relish the stories of supernatural heroism, abnegation, and sacrifice.

But sentiment above all; *true* rhyming to *you, regret* to *forget, part* to *heart,* is sufficient to force her to tears, to produce a gross exultation of the senses. The wording may be simple, the substance commonplace; but the mere statement that two people are separated and love each other is sufficient. For her the art is never deficient, and the same sing-song cry will never fail to give her the same sensations of regret and longing.

And so it used to be with Kate. When she was a girl she collected every scrap of love poetry that appeared in the local paper, pasted it into a book, and in secret, devoured each little effusion with all sorts of tender sadnesses. And now the events of the week having roused her from the lethargy into which she had fallen, she, as instinctively as an awakened child turns to the breast, turned to the *Hanley Courier* for a poem.

The verses she happened to hit on were those after her own heart, and just what were required to complete the transformation of her character—

I love thee, I love thee, how fondly, how well,
Let the years that are coming my constancy tell ;
I think of thee daily—my night-thoughts are thine,
In fairy-like vision thy hand presses mine :
And even though absent you dwell in my heart ;
Of all that is dear to me, dearest thou art.

In reading these lines Kate experienced a quick beating of the heart, her eyes filled with tears, and wrapped in brightness, like a far distant coast-line, a vision of her girlhood arose. She recalled, with a joy that was giddy, that danced in her brain, as might sunlight amid flowers, the emotions she once experienced, the books she had read, the poetry that she had gathered together, that was lying upstairs in an old trunk pushed under the bed. It seemed to her incredible that it had been forgotten so long; her memory skipped from one fragment to the other, picking up a word here, a phrase there, until a remembrance of her favorite novel seized her, and involuntarily substituting herself for the lady who used to read Byron and Shelley under the green trees to the gentleman who went to India in despair, she became the heroine of it all.

As the fitness of the comparison dawned upon her she yielded to an ineffable sentiment of weakness: George was the husband's name in the book, she was Helene, and Dick was the lover to whom she could not, would not give herself, and who on that account had gone away in despair. The coincidence appeared to her as something marvellous, something above nature, and she turned it over, examined it in her mind, as a child would a toy. And forgetful of her desire to overlook her souvenirs of old times, she went upstairs to the workroom hoping to be able to talk of Dick to Miss Hender. His Christian name had come upon her suddenly; her landlady instincts disappeared, and henceforth she thought of him as Dick.

The missed visit to the theatre was a favorite theme of conversation between the two women. It afforded Miss Hender constant opportunities of expressing her views concerning men, women, and matrimony, of speaking of Bill, of expatiating on the pleasure of the lark she had with him a night or two ago, and abusing Mrs. Ede. Kate con-

tributed little to these discussions; she listened, hazarding a word of reproof when the description of Bill's behavior became too coarse, and the denunciations of "the hag" grew disgraceful. She was sharp enough, however, not to make any confidences, and she resented all Miss Hender's insinuations, declaring, whenever she got the opportunity, that she did not admire Mr. Lennox, and that on the night in question she had been merely desirous of seeing the play. Miss Hender, although she did not believe, did the amiable, and smiled graciously. She saw no reason for annoying her employer by doubting her words. Nothing would be gained by so doing. The workroom had now, according to Miss Hender's notion, become a much more agreeable place of resort than ever it had been before. All the religious humbug had been done away with, and now you could talk pleasantly and agreeably without being afraid of being pulled up at every moment for one word or other. Kate listened to what went on behind the scenes with greater indulgence, and she seemed to have become accustomed to the idea that Bill and Miss Hender were something more than friends. In like manner she was more tolerant when "the hag's" religious opinions were attacked. It was, of course, impossible to pass over the epithet of hag without reproof; it would be wicked to hear her faith sneered at, and Kate made many efforts to control her assistant's abusive language, only these efforts were not as firm or as conclusive as they were formerly. She was conscious of these cowardices, and when she was alone she often blamed herself bitterly. Remembering the old woman's love, the sacrifices she would make for her, Kate felt her heart sink; she detested herself for it, and she often resolved never more to allow Miss Hender to speak ill of Mrs. Ede. But the temptation was so subtle, for when she was lamenting the monotony of her life (a thing she did frequently now), a little railing against her mother-in-law was a high, plaintive note which her heart vaguely sighed for. Often she unconsciously led up to this point, and had Miss Hender been contented to keep her place and do no more than duly echo her mistress's sentiments, her companionship would have left nothing to be desired. But

the girl's brutal nature could not understand wandering thoughts, and she would insist on determining the meaning of every chance complaint by some coarse and vigorous epithet. As Kate often said, it was abominable to have her thoughts interpreted in that way. She loved her mother-in-law very dearly, she didn't know what she'd do without her, but— So it went on; struggle as she would with herself, there still lay at the bottom of her mind, like a bone that a dog has hidden, the thought that Mrs. Ede had prevented her from going that evening to the theatre, and turn, twist, and wander away as she would, she came back to gnaw it invariably.

Frequently Miss Hender had to repeat her questions before she obtained an intelligible answer, and often, without even vouchsafing a reply, Kate would nervously pitch her work aside, saying she wanted to see what was going on in the shop. During these days very little work was done. Miss Hender was not the person to wear out her fingers when conversation and sympathy were all that were required of her, and Kate did not seem to care how things went. Her thoughts were elsewhere; she was waiting impatiently for an opportunity for a couple of hours during which she would not be disturbed, for the purpose of overlooking the old trunk, full of the trinkets, books, verses, souvenirs of her youth, which lay under her bed, pushed up against the wall. But a free hour was not a thing of frequent occurrence in her life; it was only possible on the condition of Mr. Ede being out. Then her mother-in-law had to mind the shop, and Kate, at the top of the house, would be sure of privacy.

There was no valid reason why she should dread being found out in so innocent an amusement as turning over a few old papers. Her fear was merely an unreasoned and nervous apprehension of ridicule. Her sentimentality had, since she could remember, always been a subject either of mourning or pity, and in allowing it to die out of her heart she had learned to feel ashamed of it: the idea of being discovered going back to it revolted her, and she did not know which would annoy her the most: her husband's sneers or Mrs. Ede's blank alarm. Kate remembered how

she used to be told that books like novels had nothing in them that led the soul to God, and, therefore, must be wicked and sinful, and, resolved to avoid any further lectures on this subject, she devoted herself to the task of persuading Mr. Ede to leave his counter and go out for a walk. This was not easy, but she arrived at last at the point of helping him on with his coat, handing him his hat, conducting him to the door, she bid him not to walk fast and be sure to keep in the sun, and then went upstairs, her mind relaxed, determined to enjoy herself to the extent of allowing her thoughts for an hour or so to wander at their own sweet will.

The trunk was an oblong box covered with brown hair; to pull it out she had to get under the bed, and it was with trembling and eager fingers that she untied the old twisted cords. Souvenir with Kate was a cult, but her husband's indifference and her mother-in-law's hard and determined opposition had forced it out of sight: but now, on the first encouragement, it gushed forth like a suppressed fountain that an incautious hand had suddenly liberated. And with what joy she turned over the old books! She examined the color of the covers, she read a phrase here and there: they were all so dear to her that she did not know which she loved the best. Scenes, heroes, and heroines, long forgotten came back to her; and in what minuteness and how vividly! It appeared to her that she could not go on fast enough; a glow of gladness had rushed to her head until she wished and longed to scream forth her delight. Her emotion gained upon her until it became quite hysterical. In turning feverishly over some papers a withered pansy floated into her lap. Immediately the tears started to her eyes, and she pressed it to her lips. There was a pitiful tenderness in the poor little flower forgotten for so long, and there seemed to be a meaning even in its feeble flutter. It had sought refuge in her bosom,—and then had fallen into her lap. She could not remember when she gathered it; all memory of it had faded; but it had come to her—it had come back to her. Kate's feelings were overwrought; her lips quivered, the light seemed to be growing dark, and a sudden sense of misery eclipsed her happiness, and unable

to restrain herself any longer, she burst into a tumultuous storm of sobs.

But after having cried for a few minutes her passion subsided, and she wiped the tears from off her hands and face, and smiling very sadly at herself, she continued her search. Everything belonging to that time, verses and faded flowers, interested her; but her thoughts were especially centred on an old copybook in which she kept the fragments of poetry that used to strike her fancy at the moment. When she came upon it her heart beat quicker and with mild sentiments of regret, she read through the slips of newspaper. They were all the same, but as long as anyone was spoken of as being the nearest and the dearest Kate was satisfied. Even the bonbon mottoes, of which there were large numbers, drew from her the deepest sighs. The little Cupid firing at a target in the shape of a heart, with "Tom Smith & Co., London," printed in small letters underneath, did not prevent her from sharing the sentiment expressed in the lines:—

Let this cracker torn asunder
Be an emblem of my heart,
And as we have shared the plunder
Pray you of my love take part.

Sitting on the floor, with one hand leaning on the open trunk, she read, letting her thoughts drift through past scenes and sensations. All was dreamy, far away; and she turned over the *débris* that the past had thrown up on the shore of the present, without seing any connection between it and the needs of the moment until she lit on the following verses:—

Wearily I'm waiting for you,
For your absence watched in vain;
Ask myself the hopeless question,
Will he ever come again?

All these years am I forgotten?
Or in absence are you true?
Oh! my darling, 'tis so lonely
Watching, waiting here for you!

Has your heart from its allegiance
  Turned to greet a fairer face ?
Have you welcomed in another
  Charms you missed in me, and grace ?

Long, long years I have been waiting,
  Bearing up against my pain ;
All my thoughts and vows have vanished,
  Will they ever come again ?

Yes, for woman's faith ne'er leaves her,
  And my trust outweighs my fears,
And I still will wait his coming,
  Though it may not be for years.

As the deer when it believes it has eluded the swift hunting hounds leaves the burning plains and plunges into the cool woodland water, Kate bathed her tired soul letting it drink its fill of this very simple poem. Tenderly the sentiment came to her through the weak words; and melting with joy, she repeated them over and over again.

At last her sad face lit up with a smile. It had occurred to her to send the poem that gave her so much pleasure to Dick. Like a ray of sunlight the thought had flashed through her soul. It would make him think of her when he was far away; it would tell him that she had not forgotten him. The idea pleased her so much that it did not occur to her to think if she would be doing wrong in sending these verses to her lodger, and with renewed ardor and happiness she continued her search among her books. There was no question in her mind as to which she would read, and she anticipated hours of delight in tracing resemblances between herself and the lady who used to read Byron and Shelley to her aristocratic lover. She feared at first she had lost this novel, but when it was discovered it was put away for immediate use. The next that came under her hand was also the story of a country doctor. In this instance the medical hero had poisoned one sister to whom he was secretly married in order that he might wed a second. Kate at first hesitated, but remembering that there was an elopement, with a carriage overturned in a muddy lane, she decided upon looking through it again.

Another book related with much pathos the love of a young lady who found herself in the awkward predicament of not being able to care for anyone but her groom, who was lucky enough to be the possessor of the most wonderful violet eyes. The fourth described the distressing position of a young clergyman, who when he told the lady of his choice that his means for the moment did not admit of his taking a wife, was answered that it did not matter, for she was, in the meantime, quite willing to be his mistress. This devotion and self-sacrifice touched Kate so deeply that she was forced to pause in her search to consider how those who have loved much, are forgiven. But at this moment Mrs. Ede entered.

"Oh, Kate! what are you doing there?"

Although the question was asked in an intonation of voice affecting to be one only of astonishment, there was nevertheless in it an accent of reproof, which, in her present mood, was especially irritating to Kate. A deaf anger against her mother-in-law's interference oppressed her, but getting the better of it she said quietly though somewhat sullenly—

"You always want to know what I am doing! I declare one can't turn round but you're after me, just like a shadow."

"What you say is unjust, Kate," replied the old woman warmly. "I'm sure I never pry after you."

"Well, anyhow, there it is; I'm looking out for a book to read in the evenings, if you want to know."

"I thought you had given up reading those vain and sinful books; they cannot do you any good."

"What harm can they do me?"

"They turn your thoughts from Christ. I have looked into them to see that I may not be speaking wrongly, and I have found them nothing but vain accounts of the world and its worldliness. I did not read far, but what I saw was a lot of excusing of women who could not love their husbands, and much sighing after riches and pleasure. I thanked God you had given over such things. I believed your heart was turned towards Him. Now it grieves me bitterly to see I was mistaken."

"I don't know what you mean. Ralph never said that there was any harm in my reading tales."

"Ah! Ralph, I'm afraid, has never set a good example. I would not blame him, for he's my own son, but I would wish to see him not prizing so highly the things of the world."

"We must live, though," Kate answered, without quite understanding what she said.

"Live, of course we have to live; but it depends how we live and what we live for—whether it be to indulge the desires of the flesh, the desire of the eye, or to regain the image of God, to have the design of God again planted in our souls. This is what we should live for, and it is only thus that we shall find true happiness."

Though these were memories of phrases heard in the pulpit, they were uttered by Mrs. Ede with a fervour, with a candour of belief, that took from them any appearance of artificiality; and Kate did not notice that her mother-in-law was using words that were not habitual to her.

"But what do you want me to do?" said Kate, who began to feel frightened.

"To go to Christ, to love Him. He is all we have to help us, and they who love Him truly are guided as to how to live righteously. Whether we eat or drink, or whatever we do, it springs from or leads to the love of God and man."

These words stirred Kate to her very entrails; a sudden gush of feeling brought the tears to her eyes, and she was on the point of throwing herself into Mrs. Ede's arms.

The temptation to have a good cry was almost irresistible, and the burden of her pent-up emotions was more than she could bear. But she hesitated, communing the while rapidly within herself, until an unexpected turn of thought harshly put it before her that she was being made a fool of —that she had a perfect right to look through her books and poetry, and that Miss Hender's sneers were no more than she deserved for allowing a mother-in-law to bully her. Then the tears of sorrow became those of anger, and striving to speak as rudely as she could, she said—

"I don't talk about Christ as much as you, But He judges

us by our hearts and not by our words. You would do well to humble yourself before you come to preach to others."

"Dear Kate, it is because I see you interested in things that have no concern with God's love that I speak to you so. A man who never knows a thought of God has been staying here, and I fear he has led you——"

At these words Kate, who had thrown the last papers into the trunk, and pushed it away, turned round fiercely.

"Led me into what? What do you mean? Mr. Lennox was here because Ralph wished. I think that you should know better than to say such things. I do not deserve it."

On this Kate left the room, her face clouded and trembling with a passion that she did not quite feel. To just an appreciable extent she was conscious that it suited her convenience to quarrel with her mother-in-law. She was tired of the life she was leading, her whole heart was in her novels and poetry, and determined to take in the *London Reader* or *Journal,* she called back to Mrs. Ede that she was going to consult Ralph on the matter.

At this time Mr. Ede was in capital spirits. The affairs in the shop were going on more satisfactorily than usual, a fact which he did not fail to attribute to his superior commercial talents. "A business like theirs went to the bad," he declared, "when there was not a man to look after it. Women so much preferred being attended to by one of the other sex;" and beaming with artificial smiles, the little man measured out yards of ribbon, and suggested "that they had a very superior thing in the way of petticoats just come from Manchester." His health was also much improved, so much so that his asthmatic attack seemed to have done him good. A little color flushed his cheeks around the edges of the thick beard. In the evenings after supper, when the shop was closed, an hour before they went up to prayers, he would talk of the sales he had made during the day, and speak authoritatively of the possibilities of enlarging the business. According to him the thing to do was to find some one in London who would forward them the very latest fashions; of course not all the fashions, but, for example, a person who would be clever enough to pick out and send them some stylish but

simple dress which Kate could copy. He would work the advertisements, and if the articles were well set in the window he would answer for the rest. The great difficulty was, of course, the question of frontage, and Mr. Ede's face grew grave as he thought of his wretched little windows. "Nothing," he said, "could be done without plate-glass," and the wonders he saw behind a single pane dazzled him very much as the possibility of a six-inch telescope did Galileo. Five hundred pounds would buy out the fruit-seller, and throw the whole place into one. Then they would require a couple of assistants! These dreams of attainable earthly grandeur caused Mr. Ede to sigh deeply; and Kate, interested in all that was imaginative, would then raise her eyes from the pages of her book, and ask if there was no possibility of realizing this grand future. But as the days went by an unaccustomed tenderness would fill her eyes as she looked at him. She was reading a novel that affected her profoundly. It was full of the most singular and exciting scenes, and she thought that under the circumstances she would have felt and acted just as the heroine did. As for the hero, had he asked her for her life she would willingly have laid it down at his feet. So charming was he, so good and so true, that heaven seemed on her lips while she read the grand and elevated thoughts that he gave utterance to on all occasions. Never did Kate remember, even when she was a child, having been impassioned and enraptured by a novel to the same extent as she was by this. For the emotions she drew from current fiction when a girl were abstract and diffused. She sighed over and was sorry for those who were disappointed in love, but now there was a shade of jealousy in her mind, and unconsciously she regretted that it was not her lot to captivate handsome young lords, and that no occasions presented themselves in her life for romantic self-sacrifices. In old times she was contented to accept the heroes and heroines as beings as far beyond her as the world beyond the hills; now she wished to know both, and devoured by an ardent thirst, she worked out preposterous resemblances between the people she read of and those who moved within, or had passed across, the nar-

row circle of her life. Dick, of course, came in for the lion's share of these imaginings, and successively she saw him as a French noble being led to execution, an Italian brigand in love with a young girl who sat perpetually in the oriel window of a castellated castle, as an English lord sacrificing everything for a lovely maiden. Indeed, the disguises in which he appeared to her were as numerous and as fantastic as those he assumed in his opera-bouffes. But he was not the only person she idealized; everyone she knew had to be likened, either to their advantage or disadvantage, to someone; and in her present book "Prince Charmian," she had discovered a character who reminded her of her husband. This person was a courtier at the court of Louis XIV. He said sharp things, and often made himself disagreeable, but there was nevertheless something about him that pleased, and under the influence of this fancy she began to find new qualities, the existence of which she had not before suspected, in Ralph. Sometimes even the thought struck her that if he had been always like what he was now she would have loved him better. One evening as she was following out the resemblance between him and the cross-grained courtier, she came across a phrase that amused her immensely. After a moment her smile deepened, and then as the humor of the scene continued to tickle her she burst out laughing.

"What are you laughing at, Kate?" said her husband, looking admiringly at her pretty face. Mrs. Ede sternly continued her knitting, but Ralph seemed so pleased, and begged so good-naturedly to be told what the matter was, that the temptation to do so grew irresistible.

"You won't be angry if I tell you?"

"Angry, no. Why should I be angry?"

"You promise?"

"Yes, I promise," replied Ralph, extremely curious.

"Well then, there is a cha—cha—rac—ter so—so like——"

"Oh! if you want to tell me don't laugh like that. I can't hear a word you are saying."

"Oh, it is so—so—so like——"

"Yes, but do stop laughing and tell me."

At last Kate had to stop laughing for want of breath, and she said, her voice still trembling:

"Well, there's a fellow in this book—you promise not to be angry?"

"Oh, yes, I promise."

"Well then, there's someone in this book that does remind me so much—of you—that is to say, when you are cross, not as you are now."

At this announcement Mrs. Ede looked up in astonishment, and she seemed as hurt as if Kate had slapped her in the face. Ralph's face, on the contrary, beamed with the delight of gratified vanity. His front teeth showed through the heavy mustache, they were set wide apart, but the space had been filled in with some white substance, which always looked as if it were going to fall out. Kate, whenever she noticed it looked aside. Ralph, who knew nothing of feminine revulsions of feelings, with eager curiosity begged of her to read the passage. Without giving it a second thought she began, but she had not read half-a-dozen words before Mrs. Ede had gathered up her knitting and was preparing to leave the room.

"Oh, mother, don't go! I assure you there's no harm."

"Leave her alone. I'm sick of all this nonsense about religion. I should like to know what harm we're doing," said Ralph.

Kate made a movement to rise, but he laid his hand upon her arm, and a moment after Mrs. Ede was gone.

"Oh, do let me go and fetch her," exclaimed Kate. "I shouldn't, I know I shouldn't, read these books. It pains her so much to see me wasting my time. She must be right."

"There's no right about it; she'd bully us all if she had her way. Do be quiet, Kate! Do as I tell you, and let's hear the story."

Relinquishing another half-hearted expostulation which rose to her lips, Kate commenced to read. Ralph was enchanted, and deliciously tickled at the idea that he was like someone in print, he chuckled under his breath. Soon they came to the part that had struck Kate as being so particularly appropriate to her husband. It concerned a

scene between this ascetic courtier and a handsome, middle-aged widow who was passionately in love with him. Frequently she had given him to understand what her feelings were on the subject of himself, but on every occasion he had pretended to misunderstand them. The humor of the whole thing consisted in the innocence of the lady, who fancied she had not explained herself sufficiently; and harassed with this idea, she pursued the courtier from the Court ball into the illuminated gardens, and there told him, and in language that admits of no doubt, how she wished to marry him. The courtier was indignant, and answers her so tartly that Kate, even in reading it a second time over, could not refrain from fits of laughter.

"It is—is so—s—o like what you w—wo—uld say if a wo—wo—man were to fol—low you," she said, with the tears rolling down her cheeks.

"Is it really?" asked Ralph, joining in the laugh, although in a way that did not seem to be very genuine. The fact was that he felt just a little piqued at being thought so indifferent to the charms of the other sex. He looked at his wife for a moment or two in a curious sort of way, trying to think the while how he should express himself. At last he said:

"I am sure that if it was my own Kate who was there I shouldn't answer so crossly."

Kate ceased laughing, and looked up at him so suddenly that she increased his embarrassment, but the remembrance that he was after all only speaking to his wife soon came to his aid, and confidentially he sat down beside her on the sofa. Her first impulse was to draw away from him—it was so long since he had spoken to her thus. Then she remembered that he was her husband.

"Could you never love me again if I were very kind to you?"

"Of course I love you, Ralph, but——"

"So much the more reason. It wasn't my fault if I was ill—and you don't feel inclined to love anyone when you're ill. Give me a kiss, dear."

A recollection of how she had kissed Dick flashed across her mind, but in an instant it was gone; and, bending her

head, she laid her lips to her husband's. It in no way disgusted her to do so; she was glad of the occasion. She was only surprised at the dull and obtuse anxiety she experienced. They then spoke of indifferent things, but the flow of conversation was often interrupted by complimentary phrases. While Ralph discoursed on his mother's nonsense in always dragging religion into everything, Kate congratulated him on looking so much better; and, as she told him of the work that she would, at all costs, have to get through before Friday, he either squeezed her hand or said that her hair was getting thicker, longer, and more beautiful than ever.

* * * * * * * *

Next morning Kate received a letter from Dick, saying he was coming to Hanley on his return visit, and hoped that he would be able to have his old rooms.

CHAPTER IX.

A DESIRE to talk to Miss Hender about Mr. Lennox took precedence in Kate's mind over any other thought. But that young person would not arrive for another hour, and Kate could not put off speaking to her husband. So she profited by an occasion when Mrs. Ede was present to hand him the letter. Nothing had ever seemed to her so important as that Dick should not be prevented from staying at her house. It was therefore with bated breath that she waited for Ralph to speak. At last his answer came, and it was satisfactory. He declared that they could not have a nicer lodger than Mr. Lennox, and the little he had seen of him made him only desirous of renewing the acquaintance. These were Ralph's shop phrases, and he continued all through breakfast to eulogize Mr. Lennox. Mrs. Ede, whose opinions were thus directly attacked, said not a word, but sat munching her bread and butter with apparently stoical indifference. But it was not permitted to anyone to be indifferent to Ralph's wishes, and determined to resent the impertinence, he derisively asked his mother if she had any objections.

"You're right to do what you like with your rooms; but I should like to know why you so particularly want this actor here? One would think he was a dear friend of yours, to hear you talk. Is it the ten shillings a week he pays for his room you're hankering after, and the few pence you make out of his breakfasts?"

"Of course I want to keep my rooms let, and am not going to throw away ten shillings a week. Perhaps you'd like to pay it yourself; you could have all the clergymen in the town to see you once a week, and a very nice tea-party you'd make in the sitting-room."

Ralph was very cross that morning, and he continued to badger his mother with the bitterest taunts he could select.

Kate did not interfere, and quite calmly she watched him work himself into a passion. As his rage increased his ideas grew loftier, until he declared that he had other reasons, more important than the ten shillings a week, for wishing to have Mr. Lennox staying in the house. This statement caused Kate just a pang of uneasiness, and she begged for an explanation. Partly to reward her for having backed him up in the discussion, and through a wish to parade his own farseeing views, he declared that Mr. Lennox might be of great use to them, if he were so inclined, in their little business. Kate could not repress a look of triumph: she knew now that nothing would keep him from having Mr. Lennox in the house; and wishing to conclude the matter she said, as she rose from table—

"Shall I write to him to-day, then, and say that we can let him have the rooms from next Monday?"

Ralph replied "Of course," and Kate went upstairs with Miss Hender, who had just come in. Then when the door of the workshop was closed the little girls were told to move aside—that there was a lot of cutting to be done. This was said preparatory to telling them, a little later on, that they were too much in the way, and would have to go down and work in the front kitchen under the superintendence of Mrs. Ede. Miss Hender was at the machine, stitching up the body of a dress, but as Kate had a dressing-gown "in order," she unrolled the blue silk and fidgeted round the table as if she had not enough room for laying out her pattern-sheets. Miss Hender noticed these manœuvres with some surprise, and when Kate had said, "Now, my dear children, I'm afraid you are very much in my way; you'd better go downstairs," she looked up with the expression of one who expects to be told a secret. This manifest certitude that something was coming discountenanced Kate, and she thought it would be better after all to say nothing about Mr. Lennox, but again changing her mind, she said, assuming an air of indifference:

"Mr. Lennox will be here on Monday. I've just got a letter from him."

"Oh, I'm so glad; for perhaps, this time, it will be possible to have one spree on the strict *q.t.*"

Kate was thinking of exactly the same thing, but Miss Hender's crude expression took the desire out of her heart, and she remained silent.

"I am sure 'tis for you he's coming," said the assistant. "I know he admires you; I could see it in his eyes. You can always see if a man likes you by his eyes."

Although it afforded Kate a great deal of pleasure to think that Dick liked her, it was irritating to the last degree to hear her feelings thus spoken of, and she had begun to regret that she had ever mentioned the subject at all, when Miss Hender said:

"But what's the use of his coming if you can't get out? A man always expects a girl to be able to go with him. The 'hag' is sure to be about, and even if you did manage to give her the slip, there's your husband. Lord! I hadn't thought of that before. What frightful luck! Don't you wish he'd get ill again? Another fit of asthma would suit us down to the ground."

To hear expressed in audible words what we are ashamed to admit even remotely to ourselves is the acutest pain. The blood rushed to Kate's face, and snapping nervously with the scissors in the air, she said:

"I don't know how you can bring yourself to speak in that way. How can you think that I would have my husband ill so that I might go to the theatre with Mr. Lennox? What do you fancy there is between us that makes you say such a thing as that?"

"Oh! I really don't know," Miss Hender answered with a toss of her head; "if you are going to be as cross and hoighty-toighty as all that, there's no use talking."

On that the conversation fell to the ground. Kate thought it very provoking that Miss Hender could never speak except in that coarse way. She was a very nice girl, very good-hearted, and it would be nice, convenient indeed, to be friendly with her; but if she could not keep herself from making such nasty remarks, there was no help for it but to treat her just as a workwoman at so much a day. Quite unwittingly Miss Hender had inflicted a very deep stab; the iron rankled deep in Kate's heart. It would have given her infinite satisfaction to have said something dis-

agreeable to her freckled-faced friend, but remembering that it would be pleasant to go to the theatre, and that the only chance of being able to do so was by their remaining friends, she bit her lips and smothered her anger. Besides, she had let Miss Hender into a good many of her secrets, and it would be most inconvenient to have her turn round on her. Not indeed that she supposed she'd be wicked enough to do anything of the kind, but still——

Influenced by these considerations, Kate determined not to quarrel, but to avoid speaking of Mr. Lennox for the future, at least until there was a definite reason for mentioning his name, and even with her own people she maintained until Dick arrived an attitude of shy reserve, declining on all occasions to discuss the subject either with her husband or mother-in-law. "I don't care whether he comes or not; decide your quarrels as you like, I have had enough of them," was her invariable answer. This air of indifference ended by annoying Ralph, but she was willing to do that if it saved her from being forced into expressing an opinion—that was the great point; for, with a woman's instinct, she had already divined that she would not be left out of the events of the coming week. But there was still another reason, one hidden away almost a secret from herself, and the most feminine of them all. Kate was somehow a little ashamed of her own treachery, and she fancied it would be less deceitful to remain silent. Otherwise her conscience did not trouble her; it was crushed beneath a weight of desire and expectancy, and for three or four days she moved about the house in a dream. Like a star in still waters, her heart burned within her, and, in fear of breaking its fiery peace, she avoided the family arguments. But in the desert silence of her brain she could almost hear the striking of the hours, in a great lucidity of thought she could almost see the sands of the minutes as they slid and fell into the void behind, and, like one in sleep, she submitted to her husband's newfound tenderness. When they met on the stairs, and he joked her about the roses in her cheeks, she smiled curiously, and begged him to let her pass. But in the workroom she was happy. The mechanical action of sewing

allowed her to follow the train of her dreams and drew the attention of those present away from her. She had tried her novels, but the most exciting now failed to fix her thoughts. The page swam before her eyes, a confusion of white and black dots, the book in a few minutes would fall upon her lap, and she would relapse again into thinking of what Dick would say to her, and of the hours that still separated them. On Sunday, without knowing why, she insisted on attending all the services. Ralph in no way cared for this excessive devotion, and he proposed to take her for a walk in the afternoon, but she preferred to accompany Mrs. Ede to church.

The solemnity of the place exalted her spirits, and it loosened the tension of her thoughts to raise her voice in the hymns. And in walking back the old woman's gabble was pleasant to listen to; it filled her ears with a murmur of meaningless sound. But when they arrived at home the peace of mind she had gained was seriously disturbed by the discovery of Dick's portmanteau, which was found lying at the foot of the stairs. Ralph explained that he had taken it in, and was waiting for some one to help him upstairs with it. Never did a woman regret the time she had spent in devotional exercises more than did Kate, and even the certitude that she would take him up his breakfast next morning seemed to her but a poor consolation. "And I have missed seeing him. Oh! how stupid, how stupid! I thought he wouldn't be here till Monday," she whispered to herself a thousand times as she arranged his room and put fresh sheets on his bed. He had told Ralph that he had a lot of business to do with the acting manager, and would not return before they went up to prayers; still Kate did not lose hope, and on the off chance that he might feel tired after his journey, and come home earlier than he expected, she endeavored to prolong the conversation after supper. By turns she spoke to Mrs. Ede of the sermons of the day, and to Ralph of the possibilities of enlarging their shop-front. But the old lady grew restive when she was forced to hear how the actor was to send them new fashions from London, as did Ralph when the conversation turned on the relative merits of the morning and

afternoon sermon. It was the old story of the goat and the cabbage—each is uneasy in the other's company; and even before the usual time mother and son agreed that it would be better to say prayers and get to bed.

Kate would have given anything to see Dick that night, and she lay awake for hours listening for the sound of the well-known heavy footstep. At last it came, tramp, tramp, a dull, heavy noisy flapping through the dark silence of the house. She trembled, fearing that he would, mistaking the door, come into their room; if he did, she felt she would die of shame. The footsteps approached nearer and nearer; her husband was snoring loudly, and, casting a glance at him, she wondered if she should have time to push the bolt to. Immediately after, Dick stumbled up the steps into his room, leaving her free to fall back upon her pillow; and, hugging the thought that he was again under her roof, dream of their meeting in the morning.

Kate had counted a great deal on the pleasure of this meeting, and she had taken some trouble in considering what his first look would be when she carried in the breakfast tray. She was, however, disappointed in all her imaginings. The duty of taking up the hot water to the lodgers devolved upon Mrs. Ede, it not being considered proper for Kate to go into a gentleman's room; but on this occasion, Mrs. Ede being out, and Ralph in bed, as Dick continued ringing, there was nothing for it but to fill a jug and carry it up to him. He was asleep, or rather dozing, when she entered, and evidently mistaking her for Mrs. Ede, did not open his eyes. Congratulating herself, and hoping to pass away unperceived, Kate glided to the wash-hand-stand, and put down the jug. But the clink of the delf caused him to look round.

"Oh! is that you, Kate?" he said, brushing aside with a wave of his bare arm his frizzly hair. "I didn't expect to see so pretty a sight first thing in the morning. And how have you been?"

"I am very well, thank you, sir," Kate replied, retreating.

"Well, I don't see why you should run away like that. What have I done to offend you? You know," he said,

lowering his voice to a confidential whisper, "I didn't write to you about the poetry you sent me (at least I suppose it was from you, it had the Hanley post-mark; if it wasn't I'll burn it), because I was afraid that your old mother or your husband might get hold of my letter."

"I must go away now, sir; your hot water is there," she said, looking nervously towards the door, which was ajar.

"But tell me, wasn't it you who sent me the verses? I have them here, and I brought you a little something, I won't tell you what, in return."

"I can't talk to you now," said Kate, casting on him one swift glance of mingled admiration and love. Although somewhat inclined to corpulence, he was a fine man, and looked a tower of strength as he lay tossed back on the pillows, his big arms and thick brown throat bare. A flush rose to her cheeks when he said that he had brought her a little something; her wildest dreams had not reached further than a hope that she was not quite forgotten. It was delicious to know that he did not utterly despise her poetry, that he had it by him. Nevertheless, it was impossible to stop talking to him now, and hoping to make him understand her position, she said, raising her voice:

"And what can I get you for breakfast, sir? Would you like an omelette?"

"Oh, I sha'n't be able to wait for breakfast; I have to be up at our acting manager's by nine o'clock. What time is it now?"

"I think it's just going the half-hour, sir."

"Oh, then, I have lots of time yet," replied Dick, settling himself in a way that relieved Kate of all apprehension that he was going to spring out before her on the floor.

"Then shall I get you breakfast, sir?"

"No, thanks, I sha'n't have time for that; I shall have something to eat up at Haye's. But tell me, is there anyone listening?" he said, lowering his voice again. "I want to speak to you now particularly, for I am afraid I shall be out all day."

Afraid that her husband might overhear her, Kate made a sign in the negative, and whispered—"To-morrow at breakfast."

Although the thought that he had a present for her made her heart beat with delight, Kate was not satisfied with this interview. She had not imagined it like this. There was a vague idea of something pretty, something coquettish associated in her mind with carrying in his breakfast tray (doubtless a souvenir of the ribbon-bedecked chambermaids she had read of in novels), which was absent in the more menial office of taking in his hot water. Besides, had he not told her that he was going to be out all day?

The week he was going to remain with them had at first appeared to her like a long vista of days to the end of which she could not quite see. Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday she had dotted over with little plans; Thursday and Friday she knew nothing of. Saturday? Well, there was just a possibility that he might not go away without kissing her. For this thought she felt irritated with herself, but she could not rid herself of it; a bitter sense of voluptuousness burnt the while at the bottom of her heart, and in a sort of deaf anger she railed again all things. Sunday she had missed him, and Monday had ended as abruptly as a barren nut. Even the magic words that he had brought her a present could not compensate for the vague sense of disappointment, and Miss Hender's interminable questions nearly drove her mad, and she already despaired of being able to go to the theatre. Nothing seemed to be going right. It wasn't this she had expected, but something totally different. Even the little gold earrings which Dick took out of a velvet case and wanted to put into her ears only added a bitterer drop to her cup. All she could do was to hide them away where no one could find them. It tortured her to have to tell him that she could not wear them, and the kiss that he would ask for, and she could not refuse, seemed only a mockery. He was going away on Sunday, and this time she did not know when he would return. In addition to all these bitter disappointments, she found herself obliged to go a long walk on Tuesday afternoon to see a lady who had written to her about a dress. She did not get home until after six, and then it was only to learn that Mr. Lennox had been about the house all day, idling, talking to Ralph in the shop—that they had gone

off to the theatre together. Mrs. Ede was more than indignant, and when the little man was brought home at night, speaking painfully in little short gasps, she declared that it was a judgment upon him. Next day he was unable to leave his room. When Dick was told what had happened he manifested much concern, and insisted on seeing the patient. Indeed, the sympathy he showed was so marked that Kate at first was tempted to doubt its sincerity. But she was wrong. Dick was truly sorry for poor Ralph, and he sat a long time with him, thinking what could be done to relieve him. He laid all the blame at his own door. He ought never to have kept a person liable to such a disease out so late at night. There was a particular chair in which Ralph always sat when he was affected with his asthma. It had a rail on which he could place his feet, and thus lift one knee almost on to a level with his chest; and in this position, his head on his hand, he would remain for hours groaning and wheezing. Dick watched him with an expression of the most genuine sorrow on his big face. So clear was it that he regretted what he had done that for a moment even Mrs. Ede's heart was softened towards him. But the thaw was only momentary; she froze again into stone when he remarked that it was a pity that Mr. Ede was ill, for they were going to play *Madame Angot* on Thursday night, and he wanted them all to come. Ralph's vanity was immensely flattered, and resolved not to be behind-hand in civility, he declared between his gasps that no one should be disappointed on his account—that he would feel highly complimented by Mr. Lennox's taking Mrs. Ede to the theatre. Kate blushed violently, but Dick seemed in no way put out, and on the spot it was arranged that Kate and Miss Hender should go together on Thursday night to see *Madame Angot*.

Suppressing her emotion as well as she could, Kate took the first opportunity of getting out of the room and running downstairs to tell Miss Hender of the good news.

She felt that she must die if any accident happened to rob her of this little pleasure. She had endured enough in the way of restraint, and could endure no more. But nothing would occur. All that was required of her was to as-

sume an air of indifference, and not betray herself to Mrs. Ede, whom she suspected of watching her. But her excitement rendered her nervous, and Kate found the calm exterior she was so desirous of imposing on herself difficult to maintain. The uncertainty of her husband's temper terrified her. It was liable at any moment to change, and on the night in question he might order her not to leave the house. If so, she asked herself if she would have the courage to disobey him? The answer slipped from her: it was impossible for her to fix her attention on anything; and although she had a press of work on her hands, she availed herself of every occasion to escape to the kitchen, where she might talk to Lizzie and Annie about the play, and explain to them the meaning of the poster, which she now understood thoroughly. Their childish looks and questions soothed the emotions that were burning within her.

Thursday morning especially seemed interminable, but at last the long-watched clock on the staircase struck the wished-for hour, and still settling their bonnet-strings, Kate and Miss Hender strolled in the direction of the theatre. The evening was dry and clear, and beyond Stoke, over an embrasure of the hills, the sun was setting in a red and yellow mist. The streets were full of people; and where Piccadilly opens into the market-place, groups and couples of factory girls were eagerly talking, some stretching forward in a pose that showed a lost profile; others, graver of face, walking straight as reeds, with their hands on their right hips, the palms flat, and the fingers half encircling the narrow waists.

"How deuced glad you must be to get out," said Miss Hender. "To be cooped up in the way you are! I couldn't stand it."

"Well, you see, I can enjoy myself all the more when I do get out."

Kate would have liked to answer more tartly, but, on second thoughts, she decided it was not worth while. It bored her to be reminded of the humdrum life she led, and to be told perpetually that it was extraordinary that she had been to the theatre only twice in her life. Of this fact she now felt deeply ashamed, particularly when it was

mentioned in Dick's presence; and for some time back she had been secretly determining to reform her life in the way of its pleasures.

"We're too soon," said Miss Hender, breaking in jauntily on Kate's reflections; "the doors aren't open yet."

"I can see that."

"But what are you so cross about?" asked Miss Hender, who was not aware of what was passing in her mistress's mind.

"I'm cross about nothing at all. But how long shall we have to wait? Mr. Lennox said he'd meet us here, didn't he?"

"Oh, he can't be long now, for here comes Wentworth with the keys to open the doors."

The street they were in was wide. At the far end it branched to the right and left rectangularly. Opposite were large flat walls, red in color, and roofed like a barn, and before one black doorway some fifty or sixty people had collected. The manager pushed his way through the crowd, and soon after, like a snake into a hole, the line began to disappear. Miss Hender explained that this was the way to the pit, and that the stage entrance was what Kate took for a cellar. A young man with a big nose, whom she recognized as Mr. Montgomery, stared at them as he passed; then came two ladies—Miss Leslie and Miss Beaumont. Dick did not appear for some time after, but at last the big hat was seen coming along. Although, as usual, in a great hurry, he was apparently much pleased to see them, and he offered Kate his arm and conducted her across the street into the theatre.

"You're a bit early, you know. The curtain doesn't go up for half-an-hour yet," he said, as they ascended a high flight of steps, at the top of which sat a woman with tickets in her hand.

"We were afraid of being too late."

"It was very good of you to come. I hope you will have a pleasant evening; it would be quite a treat to act when you were in the house."

"But aren't you going to act, sir?"

"You mustn't call me sir; everybody calls me Dick; and

I don't know anyone who has a better right to do so than you."

"But aren't you going to act, Di——? I can't say it."

"I don't call it acting. I come on in the first act. I just do that to save the salary, for, you know, I have an interest in the tour."

Kate had no idea as to what was meant by having "an interest in the tour," and fearing to waste her present happiness in questions, she did not ask. Her attention was concentrated on the big man by her side, and her observation of all things about her was as if diffused, and gave her no exact idea of their extent or character. She scarcely knew she was in a theatre, and had as yet perceived neither the star-light nor the drop-curtain. Dick spoke to her of herself, of himself; but he said nothing that recalled any of the realities of her life, and when he suddenly lifted his hand from hers and whispered, "Here comes Miss Hender. We mustn't appear too intimate before her," she experienced the sensation of one awaking out of a most delicious dream.

Immediately after Miss Hender had cast a last retort at the two men with whom she was chaffing, and descending through the chairs, said—

"Mr. Lennox, you are wanted behind."

Promising to see them again when the act was over, Dick hastened away, and Miss Hender, after settling herself in her chair, looked at Kate in a way which said as distinctly as words, "Well, my young woman, you do go it when you're out on the loose." But she refrained from putting her thoughts into words, possibly because she feared to turn her mistress from what she considered, too obviously indeed, to be the right path.

They were sitting in the middle division of a gallery divided into three parts. The brown twilight was unbroken except by the yellow-painted backs of the chairs; and a series of mirrors, enframed in black wood, decorated the walls, and reflected monotonously different small corners of the house. Only a dozen or fifteen people had as yet come in, and they moved about like melancholy shades; or, when sitting still, seemed like ink-spots on a dark background.

Kate and Miss Hender gazed into the night of the pit, which extended to the line of the orchestra. Through this huge space an agitated roll progressed in one direction, and a darkness similar to that seen at sea slumbered over the heads of the people. These could not readily be distinguished, but a bald head or a bunch of yellow flowers in a woman's bonnet appeared for an instant like the crest of a wave. Overhead the darkness was still more sombre; a dozen pale jets of a miserable iron gas-fixing hanging out of the tenebrous shadows of the roof struggled in the middle gloom, leaving the outlines of the muses that decorated the cone of this warehouse-looking theatre as undefinable as the silhouettes of the shopkeepers in the pit. But if there was not sufficient light whereby to examine the figures on the roof, the blue of the drop-curtain triumphed over every shadow. This picture was made up of a lake bluer than anything ever seen, except the sky above it; the boats were in rich brown, and the sailors seemed to wear live coals of fire in lieu of caps on their heads.

Kate had not been to the theatre since the first year of her marriage. Of the story of the play she had seen performed she preserved still a vague remembrance, although all its surroundings and adjuncts were completely forgotten. Since then a rapid glance at the red house as she passed up Queen Street, and an occasional dispute between her mother-in-law and husband regarding the wickedness he had been guilty of, in having taken his wife to such a place, was all she had to keep her memory fresh on the subject. But her interest was now of a different nature. She had come with the man who, had she examined her conscience for a moment, she would have seen already possessed her utterly. She had come to see him act—to see him dressed in fine clothes, to hear him singing songs, saying beautiful things; she didn't know what, but something outside, beyond the limits of her experience.

To act! Who shall explain the miracle! The very word tells us it is an untruth, and yet how quickly do we forget the prosaic individuality of the actor in the poetry and the silken hose of the Prince of Denmark! The intellect, at least all the sense of logic, appears for the time to be in

total abeyance. The mad are not more certain of the actuality of their delusions. And it would seem that it is not the truth nor the beauty of what is passing before our eyes that so entirely fevers and passions us. The baldest melodrama often wins the most tears; the most improbable farce often convulses us with the most violent laughter; and if we are thus deceived, what then must have been the extent and depth of the deception created in Kate's mind? She was a simple woman of the people, whose febrile and vacillating imagination had on one side been crushed and repressed by the circumscribing and monotonous routine of her humble life, and on the other exalted by the fervour of a faith which, although it had not been able to mould her character, had nevertheless endowed it with a certain idealism of thought; and when to these influences are added the demoralising effects of hundreds of sentimental and romantic stories, read in her early youth, it will be understood with what abandonment of the senses, with what alienation of the brain, Kate threw herself into the enjoyment of this evening; with what frenzy she waited for Dick, who was going that night to act for her.

The musicians had now taken their places in the orchestra; the discord attendant on the tuning of the instruments commenced, and across the dark pit the profiles of fiddlers were seen curiously bent forward, their features etched darkly against the round spots of light which the reading-lamps threw on the music-paper.

"They are going to begin now," said Miss Hender.

"Are they?" replied Kate eagerly.

"Of course; here's Montgomery."

And from under the stage the thin young man came up with a swagger, pushing his glasses higher on his beak-like nose. Then taking his place on the high stool, he squared his shoulders, looked around, waved his stick, and the sweet capricious music flowed on in all its delightful suggestiveness of folly and light love.

It was now three months since the first idea of going to the theatre had been suggested to Kate, and in the hours of waiting the desire to possess had been laboriously, secretly at work in her heart, and had constructed in her

imagination a world of phantasmal splendor, of superhuman pleasure, the vague concealing veils of which were now being lifted as the curtain was going up on the opera-bouffe of *Madame Angot.*

The sparkling marriage chorus, with the fanciful peasants and the still more fanciful bridegroom in silk, the bright appearance of Clairette at the window, and the sympathy awakened by her love for the devil-may-care revolutionary poet, dazzled and seduced Kate like a sensual dream, and in all she saw and felt there was a mingled sense of nearness and remoteness, a divine concentration, and an absence of her own proper individuality. Never had she heard such music. How suave it was compared with the austere and regular rhythm of the hymns she sang in church! The gay tripping measure of the market-woman's song filled her with visions and laughter, bright as the sunlight on faces of young girls dancing under cherry-trees. There was an accent of insincerity in the serenade, which troubled her as sudden cloud might the dreams of the most indolent of lazzaroni, but the beseeching passion of the duet revealed to her sympathies for parting lovers that even her favorite poetry had been impotent to do. The melting chords were as molten lead poured into her heart, and all her musical sensibilities rushed to her head like wine; it was only by a violent effort, full of acute pain, that she saved herself from raising her voice with those of the singers, and dreading a giddiness that might precipitate her into the pit, she remained staring blindly at the stage.

Her happiness would have been complete, if such violent emotions can be called happiness, had it not been for Miss Hender. This young person, actuated probably by a desire of displaying her knowledge, could not be prevented from talking. As each actor or actress entered she explained their position in the company, and all she knew of their habits in private life. Mr. Mortimer's dispute the other night with Bill, the scene-shifter, necessitated quite a little tirade against drunkenness, and as it was necessary to tell of what had been said in the ladies' dressing-room, a description of Miss Beaumont's underclothing

was introduced; it was very elegant, silk stockings and lace-trimmed chemises; whereas Miss Leslie's was declared to be much plainer. Once or twice Miss Hender was asked to keep quiet, but Kate did not much mind. The thunder of applause which rose from a pit filled with noisy factory boys and girls was accepted in good faith, and it floated through her mind, elevating and exciting her emotions as the roar of the breakers on the shore does the dreams of a dreamer awaiting the rising of a star. But the star she was expecting had not yet appeared. She had seen Miss Leslie, Miss Beaumont, Joe Mortimer, and Frank Bret, and numberless other people, who had appeared in all sorts of dresses and had sung all kinds of enchanting songs, but Dick was nowhere to be found. She had searched vainly for him in the maze of color that was being flashed before her eyes. Would he appear as a king, a monk, a shepherd, or would he wear a cocked-hat? She did not know, and was too bewildered to think. She had a dim notion that he would do something wonderful, set everything to rights—that they would all bow down before him when he entered, and she watched every motion of the crowd, expecting it every moment to make way for him. But he did not appear, and at last they all went away singing. Her heart sank within her, but just when she had begun to lose hope, two men rushed across the stage, and commenced to spy about and make plans. At first Kate did not recognize her lover, so completely was he disguised, but soon the dreadful truth commenced to dawn on her. Oh, misery! Oh, horror! How could this be? And she closed her eyes to shut out her dreadful disappointment. Why had he done this thing? She had expected a king, and had found a policeman.

"There he is, there he is!" whispered Miss Hender. "Don't you see, 'tis he who does the policeman? A French policeman, you know; he drags the bride away at the end of the act."

Poor Kate felt very unhappy indeed. Her fanciful house of cards had fallen down and crushed her under the ruins. She felt she could no longer take an interest in anything. The rest of the act was torture to her. What pleasure

could it be to her to see her lover, looking hideous, drag a bride away from her intended? Had it not been for shame of Miss Hender, she thought, she would have left the theatre: the fall of the curtain closing the ugly vision came as a welcome relief: and when Dick, looking no worse for his impersonation of the foreign policeman, sat down by her side her embarrassment was increased.

"Well, how did you like the piece, dear?"

"Oh! very much," returned Kate plaintively, fearing she was being laughed at.

"I'm afraid you didn't," replied Dick, laying his hand affectionately on hers, a movement which caused Miss Hender to retire precipitately. Kate begged of her to stay, but she said she had to speak to the manager on some business which she had until now forgotten.

"Why do you want her to stay?" said Dick, "don't you like being alone with me?" Kate answered him with a look, wondering all the while what could have induced him to play the part of that ugly policeman. "I'm sure you didn't like the piece," he continued, "and yet I must say from behind it seemed to go very well; but then there are so many things you miss from the wings."

Kate understood nothing of what he said, but seeing that he was terribly sincere, and fearing to pain him, she hastened to give the piece her unqualified approbation.

"I assure you I couldn't have liked anything more, the music is so pretty."

"And how did you think I looked? It is only a small part, you know, but at the same time it requires to be played. If there isn't some go put into it the finale all goes to pot."

Now Kate felt sure he was quizzing her, and at length she said, the desire to speak her mind triumphing over her shyness, "But why did you make yourself look like that? It wasn't a nice part, was it?"

"It is only a trumpery bit of a thing, but it is better for me to take it than have another salary on the list. In the next act, you know, I come on as the captain of the guard."

"And will that be nice?" Kate asked, her face flushing at the idea of seeing her lover in a red coat.

"Oh, yes, it looks well enough, but it isn't an acting part. I am only on for a few minutes. I am only supposed to come on in search of the conspirators. I take a turn or two of the waltz with Miss Beaumont, who plays Lange, and it is all over. Have you ever heard the waltz?" Kate never had; so drawing her close to him, he sang in her ear the soft flowing melody. In her nervousness she passionately squeezed his hand, and this encouraged him to say, "How I wish it were you that I had to dance with! how nice it would be to hold you in my arms! Would you like to be in my arms?"

Kate looked at him appealingly; but nothing more was said, and soon after Dick remembered he had to get the stage ready for the second act. As he hurried away, Miss Hender appeared. She had been round to the "pub" to have a drink with Bill, and had been behind talking to her ladies, who were all, as she said, "full of Dick's new mash."

"They have seen you, and are as jealous as a lot of cats."

"It is very wicked of them to say there's anything between Mr. Lennox and me," replied Kate, angrily. "I suppose they think everybody is like themselves—a lot of actresses."

Miss Hender made no answer, but she turned up her nose at what she considered to be d—— insulting to the profession.

However, in a few minutes, when her indignation evaporated, she called Kate's attention to what a splendid house it was.

"I can tell you what, with a shilling pit, a sixpenny gallery, and the centre and side circles pretty well full, it soon runs up. There must be nigh on seventy pounds in; and that for Thursday night!"

They were now well on in the second act. The brilliancy of the "Chœur des Merveilleuses," the pleading pity of "She is such a simple little thing," the quaint drollery of the conspirators, had almost made Kate forget the aspersions cast on her character. The light music foamed in her head like champagne, and in a whirling sense of intoxication a vision of Dick in a red coat passed and repassed before her. But for this she had to wait a long time. How-

ever, at last the sounds of trumpets were heard, and those on the stage cried that the soldiers were coming. Kate's heart throbbed, a mist swam before her eyes, and immediately after came a sense of bright calm; for, in all the splendor of uniform, Dick, big and stately, entered at the head of a regiment of girls in red tights. The close-fitting jacket had reduced his size, the top-boots gave a dignity to his legs. He was doubtless a fine man; to Kate he was more than divine. Then the waltz began, the sweet undulating tune he had sung in her ears, and casting a glance of explanation in the direction of the gallery, he put his arm round Miss Beaumont's waist. The action caused Kate a heart-pang, but the strangeness of the scene she was witnessing distracted her thoughts. For immediately the other actors and actresses in their startling dresses selected partners, and the stage seemed transformed into a wonderful garden of color swinging to the music of a fountain, which under the inspiration of the moonlight, broke from its monotonous chant into rhythmical variations. Dick, like a great tulip in his red uniform, turned in the middle, and Miss Beaumont in her long yellow dress sprawled upon him. Each time she passed in front, through her dress, which was open on both sides, her thick pink legs were seen to the knees, which Kate for disgust strove not to see. Miss Leslie in her bride's dress bloomed a lily white, as she danced with a man whose red calves and thighs seemed prolonged into his very chest. La Rivodière cast despairing glances at Lange, poor Pomponet strove to get to his bride, and all the blonde wigs and black collars of the conspirators were mixed amid the strange poke bonnets of the ladies, and the long swallow-tailed coats, reaching almost to the ground, flapped in and out of the legs of the female soldiers. Kate smiled feebly and drank in the music of the waltz. It was played over again; like a caged canary's song it haunted Clariette's orange-blossoms, like the voluptuous thrill of a nightingale singing in a rose-garden it flowed about Lange's heavy draperies and glistening bosom, like the varied chant of the mocking bird it came from under Ange Pitou's cocked-hat. It was sung separately and in unison, and it penetrated, winding and unwinding itself,

into the deepest recesses with the long undulations of a beautiful snake and the mystery of a graceful cat. It went and it came, stretching forth invisible hands, as might sirens leaning out of blue ocean waters; it whispered, as they might, of fair pleasure places where scent, and music, and love are one, where lovers never grow weary, and where kisses endure for ever. She was conscious of deep self-contentment, of dreamy idleness, of sad languor, and the charm to which she abandoned herself resembled the enervations of a beautiful climate, the floating softness of a church, and she yearned for her lover and the fanciful life of which he was the centre, as one might for some ideal fatherland. On the sweet current of the music she was carried far away, far beyond the great hills into a land of sleep, dream, and haze, and a wonderful tenderness swam within her as loose and as dim as the green sea depths that a wave never stirs. She struggled, but it was only as one in a dream strives to lift himself out of the power that holds; and when the conductor waved his stick for the last time, and the curtain came down amid deafening applause, irritated and enervated, she shrank from Miss Hender, as if anxious not to be wholly awakened.

The third act passed she scarcely knew how. She was overborne and over tempted; all her blood seemed to be in her head and heart, and, from time to time, she was shaken with quick shudderings.

When Dick came to see her she scarcely understood what he said to her, and it annoyed her not to be able to answer him. When the word love was pronounced she smiled, but her smile was one of pain, and she could not rouse herself from a sort of sad ecstasy in which she was plunged. Glad as the tunes might be, there was to her a savor of cynicism in all the merriment. A fathomless grief seemed to be vaguely reflected therein, and occasionally it startled her happiness.

But when, like an irritating dream, the music came to an end, she found herself walking in the street with Dick. It was a lovely night. A large gold moon swam through the clear September sky, and the streets were filled with long spaces of light and shadow.

"How nice it is to be here out of that hot, stuffy theatre," said Dick, putting his arm round her.

"Oh, do you think so? I could listen to that music forever."

"It is pretty, isn't it? I'm so glad you liked it. I told you the waltz was lovely."

"Lovely! I should think so. I shall never forget it."

And losing her habitual shyness in her enthusiasm, she sang the first bars with her face raised towards her lover's; then gaining courage from his look of astonishment and pleasure, she gave all the modulations with her full voice.

"By Jove, you have a deuced nice soprano, and a devilish good ear, too. 'Pon my soul, you sing that waltz as well as Beaumont."

"Oh, Dick, you mustn't laugh at me."

"I swear I'm not laughing. Sing it again, nobody's listening."

They were standing in the sade of a large warehouse, whose line of slates made a crescent of the full moon. The silence of the street was clear as silver, and amid the reverberating yards and brickways the voice sounded as penetrating and direct as a flute. The exquisite accuracy of Kate's ear enabled her to give each note its just value. Dick was astonished, and he said when she had finished—

"I really don't want to flatter you, but with a little teaching you would sing far better than Beaumont. Your ear is perfect; it is the production of the voice that wants looking to. 'Tis, of course, a bit throaty."

Kate did not answer, and suffocated with secret joy, she walked by Dick's side. She was conscious of having interested him in herself as she had not done before. Now he treated her as an equal. He talked to her of the different tunes, listened to what she had to say, and encouraged her to try to recall the rest of the music. At every twenty yards he would stop to beg of her to repeat, and he showed her how to emphasize the air of certain songs. In particular he was anxious that she should learn the legend of Madame Angot. And so deeply interested were they, that, indifferent to time or place, they raised their voices,

and went through the action of the hands on the hips and shakes of the head that the song required.

"Now," said Dick, "I'll sing the symphony, and we'll go through it with all the effects—one, two, three, four, ta ra ta ta ta ta."

But as Kate attacked the first bar it was taken up by three or four male voices, the owners of which, judging by the sound, could not be more than forty or fifty yards away.

"Here's Montgomery, Joe Mortimer, and all that lot. I wouldn't for anything be caught here with you."

"By going up to this passage we can get home in two minutes."

"Can we? Well, let's cut; but no, they are too close on us. Do you go, dear; I'll remain and tell them it was a lady singing out of that window. Here, take my latchkey. Off you go."

Without another word Kate fled down the alley, and Dick was left to explain whatever he pleased concerning the mythical lady whom he declared he had been serenading.

When Kate arrived home that night she lay awake for hours, restlessly tossing, her brain whirling with tunes and parts of tunes. The conspirators' chorus, the waltz song, the legend, and a dozen disconnected fragments of the opera all sang together in her ears, and under strange conditions she continued to take singing lessons from Dick. The profound and intimate happiness caused by the certain knowledge that he loved her did not leave her, and when next morning she met Miss Hender she could withhold little of her secret. The desire to speak of Dick burnt her like a thirst, and the whole day the women talked of love and the delights thereof. During the pauses of the conversation, and when she was not speaking, she communed greedily with herself. She was dreamily satisfied, and it was not until Miss Hender left her to go to the theatre, that is to say to go to Dick, that she commenced to realize, in all its direct brutality, the fact that on the morrow she would have to bid good-bye to her lover. In the silence of the front kitchen there was nothing to distract Kate's

thoughts. Her husband wheezed on the sofa, her mother-in-law read the Bible, sitting bolt upright in the armchair, and the shaded lamp covered the table with light. A rage that seemed every moment to be getting the upper hand of her burnt fiercely within her, and fearing she might be provoked into shrieks or some violent manifestation of temper she went to bed as early as she could. But there her torments became still more intolerable. All sorts of ideas and hallucinations, magnified and distorted, but rendered astonishingly clear by the effects of insomnia, filled her brain. She could re-see the murders she had read of in her novels. Her imagination supplied details the author had not dreamed of. The elopements, with all their paraphernalia of moonlight and roses, came back to her as landscapes do to a still lake. But these were the sweet moments of relief, divine cessations of pain, from which she was cruelly awakened by the certitude that in a few hours they would be separated forever. An extreme nervousness took possession of her, and she trembled at her own thoughts. One imperative and convincing desire had swollen her heart until she seemed to herself to be all heart. Other joys appeared vain, weak, and unmeaning. By times, when she remembered the pious, religious life she had been brought up in, she started, unable to understand her present attitude of mind, and then when she looked into her own soul she saw there a wicked, violent woman whom she did not know, just as a woman before a glass after a feverish night might fail to recognize her own changed face. But notwithstanding this excitement and rage, she never attempted to come to a conclusion—to mark out for herself a distinct line of conduct. She merely hopelessly and helplessly abandoned herself to her suffering, and often in positive frenzy she buried her head in the pillows in the hopes of shutting out the sound of her husband's snores.

At last she felt him moving like one about to awake, and a moment afterwards heard him say, "There's Mr. Lennox at the door; he can't get in; he's kicking up an awful row. Do go down and open for him."

"Why don't you go yourself?" she answered, starting up into a sitting position.

"How am I to go? You don't want me to catch my death at that door?" Ralph replied angrily.

Kate did not answer, but quickly tying a petticoat about her, and wrapping herself in her dressing-gown, she went downstairs. It was quite dark, and she had to feel her way along. At last, however, she found and pulled back the latch, but when the white gleam of moonlight entered she retreated timidly behind the door.

"I am so sorry," said Dick, trying to see who was the concealed figure, "but I forgot my latchkey."

"It does not matter," said Kate.

"Oh, it is you, dear. I have been trying to get home all day to see you, but couldn't. Why didn't you come down to the theatre?"

"You know that I can't do as I like."

"Well, never mind; don't be cross; give me a kiss."

Kate shrunk back, but Dick took her in her arms. "You were in bed, then?" he said, chuckling.

"Yes, but you must let me go."

"I should like never to let you go again."

"But you are leaving to-morrow."

"Not unless you wish me to, dear."

Kate did not stop to consider the impossibility of his fulfilling his promise, and, her heart beating, she went upstairs. On the first landing he stopped her, and laying his hand on her arm, said, "And would you really be very glad if I were to stay with you?"

"Oh, you know I would, Dick."

They could not see each other. After a long silence she said, "We must not stop talking here. Mrs. Ede sleeps, you know, in the room at the back of the workroom, and she might hear us."

"Then come into the sitting-room," said Dick, taking her hands and drawing her towards him.

"Oh, I cannot."

"I love you better than any one in the world."

"No, no; why should you love me?"

CHAPTER X

S this the stage entrance?"

"Yes, ma'am. During the performance the real stage-door is used as a pit entrance, and we pass under the stage."

This explanation was given when a swaggering attitude had been assumed, and a knowing wink, the countersign for "Now I'm going to do something for your amusement," had been bestowed on his pals. The speaker was a rough man with a beard and a fez cap. He was the prominent figure of a group loitering before a square hole with an earthward descent, cut in the wall of the Hanley theatre.

Kate was, however, too occupied with her own thoughts to notice that she was being laughed at, and she said instantly, "I want to see Mr. Lennox; will you tell him I'm here?"

"Mr. Lennox is on the stage; unless yer on in the piece I don't see 'ow it's to be done."

At this rebuff Kate cast a circular look, full of embarrassment, on the grinning faces, but at that moment a rough-looking fellow, of the same class as the speaker, ascended from the cellar-like opening, and after nudging his "pal," touched his cap, and said with the politeness of one who had been tipped, "This way, marm. Mr. Lennox is on the stage, but if you'll wait a minute I'll tell 'im yer 'ere."

At such evident signs of managerial patronage, deferentially the group made way for Kate to pass down the rough, boarded way.

"Take care, marm, or yer'll slip; very arkerd place to get down, with all 'em baskets in the way. This company do travel with a deal of luggage. That's Mr. Lennox's, the one as yer 'and is on."

"Oh, indeed," said Kate, stopping on her way to read Mr. Lennox's name on the basket.

"We piles 'em 'gainst that 'ere door so as to 'ave em 'andy for sending down to the station ter-morrow morning. But if you will remain here a moment, marm, I'll run up on the stage and see if I can see 'im."

The mention made by the scene-shifter of the approaching removal of Dick's basket struck Kate with a chill of despair. She had scarcely spoken to him since last night. He had been obliged to go out in the morning before breakfast; and though he had tried hard to meet her during the course of the day, fate seemed to be against them. On one occasion Mrs. Ede could not be got rid of; on another it had so happened that she had just gone round the corner. It was terrible, Kate thought, that such things should happen; and towards evening her brain took fire, and she resolved at all costs to see him; and without even troubling to invent an excuse to account for her absence she had rushed off to the theatre.

Overhead was heard the multitudinous sound of trampling feet; on the right the noise of fiddles and cornets, followed by the high whistling of a clarionet, pierced through the open boarding. She was in a large, low-roofed storeroom with an earthen floor. The wooden ceiling was supported by an endless number of upright posts, which gave the place the appearance of a ship. At the further end there were two stone staircases leading to opposite sides of the stage. In front of her were a drum and a barrel, and the semi-darkness at the back was speckled over with the sparkling of the gilt tinsel-stuff used in pantomimes; a pair of lattice-windows, a bundle of rapiers, a cradle, and a breastplate, formed a group in the centre—a broken trombone lay useless at her feet. The soft, flaccid odor of size which the scenery exhaled was suggestive of Ralph's room; and spasmodically she considered the things around her. She wondered if the swords were real, what different uses the tinsel-paper might be put to, until, like one rent by a fierce neuralgic pain, she would awake from her dream, asking herself bitterly why he did not come down to see her. Then, in the pause that followed the question, she was startled by a prolonged shout from the chorus. The orchestra seemed to be going mad, the drum was thumped,

the cymbals were clashed, and back and forward rushed the noisy feet, first one way, then the other;—a soprano voice was heard for a moment clear and distinct, and then was drowned immediately after in a general scream. What could it mean? Had the place taken fire? Kate asked herself wildly.

"The finale of the act 'as begun, marm; Mr. Lennox will be hoff the stage directly."

"Has nothing happened, then? is the——?"

The scene-shifter's look of astonishment showed Kate that she was mistaken; and then Bill, for it was he, tried to make himself agreeable by speaking of Miss Hender. But before they had time to exchange many words, the trampling and singing overheard suddenly ceased, and the muffled sound of clapping and applause was heard in the distance.

"There's the act," said Bill; "he'll be down now immediately; he'll take no call for the perliceman."

It seemed to Kate that the mention of the policeman must have been meant as a sneer, but intimidated by the mystery of the language in which it was couched she said nothing. A moment after, a man attired in knee-breeches, with a huge cravat wound several times round his throat, came running down the stone staircase."

"Oh, 'ere he is," said Bill. "I'll leave yer now, marm."

"And so you found your way, dear?" said Dick, putting out his arm to draw Kate towards him.

But he looked so very strange with the great patches of coarse red on his cheeks, and the deep black lines drawn about his eyes, that she could not conceal her repulsion. Guessing the cause of her embarrassment, he said laughing:

"Ah, I see you don't know me! 'Tis a good make-up, isn't it? I took a good deal of trouble with it."

Kate made no answer; but the sound of his voice soothed her, and she leaned upon his arm.

"Give me a kiss, dear, before we go up," he said coaxingly.

Kate looked at him curiously, and then, laughing at her

own foolishness, said, "Wait until you have the soldier's dress on."

At the top of the staircase the piled-up side-scenes made so many ways and angles that Kate had to keep close to Dick for fear of getting lost. However at last they arrived in the wings, where gaslights were burning blankly on the white-washed walls. A crowd of loud-voiced, perspiring girls, in short fancy petticoats and bare necks and arms, pushed their way towards, and scrambled up, mysterious and ladder-like staircases. Ange Pitou had taken off his cocked-hat and was sharing a pint of beer with Clairette. It being her turn to drink, she said:

"Now hold my skirts in, there's a dear; this beer plays the devil with white satin."

"What nonsense!" replied Ange. "It isn't on to your skirts it will go if you spill it, but into your bosom. Stop a second, and I'll give the bottom of the pot a wipe, then you'll be all right."

In the meanwhile Pomponet and La Rivodière were engaged in a violent quarrel.

"Just you understand," shouted Mortimer, "if you want to do any clowning you had better fill your wig with sawdust. It had better be stuffed with something."

This sally was received with looks of approbation from a circle of supers, who were waiting in the hopes of hearing some spirited dialogue.

"Clowning! And what can you do? I suppose your line is the legitimate. Go and play Don John again, and you'll read us the notices in the morning."

"Notices! What's the use of your talking of notices! You never had one, except one to quit from your landlady, poor woman!" replied Mortimer in his most nasal intonation of voice.

Enchanted at this witticism, the supers laughed, and poor Dubois would have been utterly done for if Dick had not at that moment interposed.

Then the scene became more than ever fantastic. Dick, in the costume of a policeman of a bygone age, keeping the peace between a hideous bridegroom in white, with long ringlets over his neck, and a little man wearing a card-

board skull. What did it mean? A pained sense of bewilderment, but one so clear and acute that it could not be taken for a dream, was Kate's first feeling. The sweet indolence, the vague mystery she had experienced, when she was in the theatre on Thursday night, were replaced by a glittering nearness of vision that was at once fragmentary and irritating; and, longing to shade her dazzled eyes and stay her stunned ears, she withdrew into a corner. The crowding chorus stared at her, and the principals, who loitered in the wings, leered and whispered. Kate could see that she was attracting attention, and passionately she wished that the bridegroom and the baldheaded man would leave off disputing, and allow Dick to come back to her. But they seemed as if they would never cease talking. After abusing each other in as close proximity as Dick would allow them to get, they generally walked away, as turkey-cocks will, but, just as a hope began to dawn that it was all over, one would suddenly return and open the whole argument up afresh. It was impossible to say which was the worse; the bridegroom was the most offensive, but Pomponet strutted and shook his bald head very aggressively. Kate often feared that they were going to kill each other; but nothing of the kind happened, and after a deal of cajolery Dick got them into their dressing-room.

"What do you think, dear," he said, drawing her aside, "if I go and make my change now? I don't come on till the end of the act, and we'll be able to talk without interruption till then. Besides, you say you like me better as the captain of the guard."

Kate looked at him in astonishment. She had expected him to explain the rights and wrongs of that terrible quarrel, which so providentially had passed off without bloodshed, and he seemed to have forgotten all about it.

"But those two gentlemen—the actors—what will happen? Are they going to go away?"

"Go away? Oh Lord, no! They are both right and both wrong. Of course it is riling to have a fellow mugging behind you with his wig when you are speaking, but one must go in for a bit of extra clowning on a Saturday night."

Kate knew not what to answer, and, without waiting to

consider the matter further, Dick darted down a passage. When he was with her it was well enough, but the moment his protection was withdrawn all her old fears returned to her. She did not know where to stand. The scene-shifters had come to carry away the scenes that were piled up in her corner, and one of the huge slips had nearly fallen on her. A troop of girls in single colored gowns and poke bonnets had stopped to stare at her. She remembered their appearance from Thursday, but she had not seen then their vulgar, everyday eyes, nor heard until now their coarse, everyday laughs and jokes. Amid this group Lange, fat and lumpy, perorated. She was abusing Hanley.

"The most beastly place I ever was in, my dear. I always dread the week here. Just look round the house. I don't believe there's a man in front who has a quid in his pocket. Now at Liverpool there are lots of nice men. You should have seen the things I had sent me when I was there with Harrington's company; and the bouquets. There were flowers left for me every day."

What all this meant Kate did not know, and she did not care to guess. For a moment the strange world she found herself in had distracted her thoughts, but it could do so no longer; no, not if it were ten times as strange. What did she care for these actresses? What was it to her what they said or what they thought of her? She had come to look after her lover; that was her business, and that only. He was going away to-morrow, and they had arranged nothing! It was that that was terrible. She did not know whether he was going to remain, or if he expected her to follow with him, and the uncertainty, the delay, irritated and maddened her. She hated the people around her; she hated them for their laughter, for their fine clothes; she hated them above all, because they were all calling for him. It was Mr. Lennox here and Dick there. What did they want with him? Could they do nothing without him? It seemed to her that they were all mocking her, and she hated them for it.

The stage was now full of women. The men stood in the wings or ran to the ends of distant passages and called "Dick, Dick, Dick."

The orchestra had ceased playing, and the noise in front of the curtain was growing every moment angrier and louder.

At last Dick appeared, looking splendid in red tights and Hessian boots. Rushing on the stage he caught hold of two or three girls, changed their places, peeped to see if Montgomery was all right, and then gave the signal to ring up.

But once the curtain was raised, he was surrounded by half-a-dozen persons, who all wanted to speak to him. Ridding himself of them, he contrived to get to Kate's side, but they had not exchanged half-a-dozen words before the proprietor asked if he could "have a moment." Then Miss Hender turned up, and begged of Kate to come and see the dressing-rooms, but fearing to miss him she declared she preferred to stay where she was. Nevertheless it was difficult not to listen to her friend's explanations as to what was passing on the stage, and in one of these unguarded moments Dick disappeared. It was heartbreaking, but she could do nothing but wait until he came back. This was not for at least ten minutes, and Kate had a terrible time of it. Like an iron, the idea that she was about to lose her lover forced itself deeper into her heart. The fate of her life was hanging in the balance, and the few words that were to decide it were, time after time, by things of no importance, being delayed. Dick, who had now returned, was talking with the gasmen, who wanted to know if the extra "hand" he had engaged was to be paid by the company or the management. It was maddening. Never in her life had she felt so miserable. Every now and again an actress or an actor would rush through the wings and stare at her; sometimes it was the whole chorus, headed by Miss Beaumont, whose rude remarks frequently reached her ears.

She tried to retreat, but the rude eyes and words followed her. Occasionally the voice of the prompter was heard, "Now then, ladies, silence if you please; I can't hear what's being said on the stage." But no one listened to him. Like animals in a fair, they continued to crush and to crowd in the passage, between the wings and the

whitewashed wall. A tall, fat girl stood close by; her hand was on her sword, which she slapped slowly against her thighs. Kate quailed beneath her glance, and shrank back disgusted. The odor of hair, cheap scent, necks, bosoms, and arms, was overpowering, and to Kate's sense of modesty there was something revolting in this loud display of body. But a bugle call was soon sounded in the orchestra, and this was the signal for much noise and bustle. The conspirators rushed off the stage, threw aside their cloaks and immediately after the soft curling strains of the waltz were heard; then the bugle was sounded again, and the girls began to tramp.

"Cue for soldiers' entrance," shouted the prompter.

"Now then, ladies, are you ready?" cried Dick, as he put himself at the head of the army.

"Yes," was murmured along the line, and Kate watched the burly shoulders of her hero marching away at the head of the red legs.

Tears mounted to her eyes; suddenly her grief became too great for her to bear, and she burst into an uncontrollable fit of sobbing. What was she to do? she asked herself. She had been deserted. How foolishly, how wickedly she had acted! But in reality her emotion was more physical than anything else—a passionate outburst of harassed and exhausted sensibilities. At the bottom of her heart she did not fear desertion so much as she would pretend to herself. A woman's instinct tells her when the real wolf is nigh, and listening to the melodious song of the waltz, she examined her grief somewhat as she might a plaything. With tears streaming down her cheeks she sang the tune sadly in an undertone, and it consoled her as a cradle-song might a child. It consisted of one melodious phrase, a long sigh of conscious sensuality, backed up by short, crisp variations that sounded like a series of little cynical laughs.

She was now left alone. Everyone was on the stage, the wings were deserted; only the gasman stood at his taps, and his back was turned to her, and under the influence of the music gradually the dreams of the other night began to float like rosy mists through the halo of her sorrow. But this was for a moment only. The gasman suddenly un-

wound a rope, down came the curtain, and Kate was again surrounded by a herd of females. The strangeness of the costume lent them a coarseness more than their own. It was horrifying to see Beaumont holding her dress above her calves. The conspirators had pulled off their wigs, and there was something indescribably painful in the contrast their close-cut pates made with their knee-breeches, and long coats of old time. Familiarity hides many of the abominations of our lives from us, and we have no suspicion of the truth until we change the form. The bitterness or sweetness of a well-worn adage appeals to us when it is clothed in new language; in the old words, its philosophy would have passed unperceived. And thus it was with these supers and chorus-girls. In pea-jackets and print dresses their coarseness would have attracted no attention; to see and judge of their animalism it was necessary to disguise them in the costumes of the Directoire.

Kate shrank back mortified and enraged that this crowd should be witness to her tears.

"What's she crying for? Who is she?"

"A spoon of Dick's," someone whispered, and the lot chuckled and laughed. At last, unable to endure it any longer, Kate profited by a break in the ranks to step aside, and she ran through the wings towards the back of the stage. There she met Dick.

"And what is the matter, dear?" he said, drawing her to him. "What is all this crying about?"

"Oh, Dick! you shouldn't neglect me as you do. I have been waiting here, amid those horrid girls, nigh an hour for you, and you are talking to everybody but me."

"It wasn't my fault, dear; I was on in the last act. They couldn't have finished it without me."

"I don't know, I don't know; but you are going away to-morrow, and I shall never see you again. It is very hard on me that this last night—night—that——"

"Now, don't cry like that, dear. I tell you what. It is impossible to talk here; everybody's after me. I'll take off these things, and we'll go for a walk through the town—will that do? I know we've a lot of things to speak about."

The serious way in which he spoke this last phrase

brought courage to Kate, and she strove to calm herself, but she was sobbing so heavily that she could not answer.

"Well, you wait here, dear; no one will disturb you, and I sha'n't be above two minutes."

Kate nodded her head in reply, and, smiling through her tears, raised her face for a kiss.

Five minutes after they were walking up the street together.

"And how did you get out, dear? Did they see you?"

"No; Ralph is bad with his asthma, and mother is sitting upstairs with him. I said I had some sewing to do."

"You must find it dreadful dull; five minutes' talk with the old woman gives me the blues for a week."

"It seems very stupid to me, too—at least, since I have known you. Oh, Dick, Dick! I can't bear to think you are going. I shall never see you again."

"Yes you will, dear; we'll try to manage something. You know you have a nice little voice; I could get you something to do. I wonder if your husband would consent to your going on the stage?"

"That's impossible; who would do the dressmaking for him? He talks of the business, but if we were relying on what we sell, we'd be starving to-morrow."

To this Dick made no answer. Now, wrapped in thought, he walked with Kate hanging on his right arm, his left he carried across his chest so that he might hold her hand in his. She told him in brief and passionate phases how impossible it would be for her to endure her life when he went away. She begged of him not to desert her; she besought of him to prolong his stay at least another week, and refused to understand that this was utterly impossible, that another company would be in Hanley on Monday morning.

Slowly they passed on; stopping when their talk grew more than ever earnest, and facing each other they held each other's hands, regardless of the jeers of the laughing factory girls.

"I wouldn't kiss her to-night if I were you," said the most impudent.

"Wouldn't you, indeed?" cried two youths, who, steal-

ing up from behind, seized two of the girls by the waists, and at once administered a series of vigorous kisses. In the struggle and jolting with which these embraces were received Dick and Kate got pushed into the street, and this kind of incident was repeated constantly. Like rabbits come out to disport in the evening, the inhabitants of Hanley had come out of their brick burrows and were enjoying themselves in the market-place. The old men talked in groups and loitered in the roadway, the young men, amorously inclined, larked along the pavement.

"Let's get out of this row," said Dick. "Is there no quiet street where we could talk in peace."

"There's Market Street up there. You remember, Dick —where you met me, the day you took me to the potteries."

"Let's walk up there then, dear; it will be nice to see the place again. I didn't know I loved you till that morning."

These reminiscences were very bitter to talk of, now that only a few hours of love remained to them, but for the moment she said nothing. They passed the dusty square of ground where, in the daytime, the children pulled at the swings and the broken merry-go-rounds. Dark shadows now filled the spaces, and only a few figures could be seen strolling under the high walls at the back. Dick tried to remember in which of the pillbox-looking houses he had been recommended to seek for lodgings. It seemed to him very singular that if he hadn't missed a turning he wouldn't be now thinking of running away with a married woman.

Kate thought of how she had come out that eventful morning with Mrs. Barnes's dress, and how she had stopped to look at the hills, and was thinking of the world far beyond them, when he came up and spoke to her. And filled with these half sad, half sweet recollections, they walked towards the square of sky enframed in the end of the street. At last, as they were approaching the summit, Dick said:

"I hope they won't miss you at home. What excuse would you give for being out so late?"

"You mean to say you want to get rid of me! Oh, Dick, Dick! how can you be so cruel!"

"My dear, I swear to you I never thought of such a

thing. Now don't begin to cry; I assure you I was only thinking of that confounded old woman. What, after all, is it to you what she says?"

"Yes, what is it to me? Why should I care? They only make me miserable, you make me happy; at least I should be happy if I did not think I was going to lose you. Oh, Dick! you won't leave me; tell me, tell me, that you won't leave me?"

They had now reached the exact spot where they had met on that memorable day that had decided the fate at least of her life. Full of sad languor, Kate clung to Dick's arm, and they walked back and forwards about the grass-grown mounds of cinders.

Below them lay the immense black valley, growing dimmer in the vague and melancholy mists of evening. From the dream-filled opening on the left, where in the clear sunlight the outlines of the Wever Hills are seen, the vapors now, like a gray army of ghosts bearing with them winding-sheets and cere-cloths of soft shadow, stole slowly forward. In the vast calm a warm air was exhaled from this bowel of the earth; already the brutal abruptness of the brick-work of the distant factories was a little blended, just as too hard a drawing is modulated by the passing of a neutral tint over it; and the deep harmonic measures of monochrome were broken nowhere, except by the black spire of Northwood church, which pierced the one band of purple that yet remained. Below it the crescent-shaped suburb slept like a scaly reptile just crawled from out of its bed of slime. Not a light was yet visible in its innumerable windows, and as the night advanced the white gables of Bagnall Rectory disappeared in the middle gloom of a milk-colored fog. Up above, however, there was more light, and the dark stems and lowering smoke of the chimneys still contrasted with the dim background of the hills. But this distinction was rapidly disappearing. A scattered veil seemed to fall from the gray heights of the sky and to be dragged in fragments along the valley, between the spectators and the wide green masses of the hills. Woods and fields were now blurred and confused, all distinctness, all detail was lost, and the huge rolling sides seemed more than

ever like the swell of some gigantic tide-wave pausing before it should engulf on its onward way the sand-mound constructed by some intrepid child. As Kate watched the hills disappearing from her sight, she thought of the influence they had exercised upon her, and she recalled the imagination they had fed, the dreams they had given her. But this time of tenderness did not last long; the bitterness that had been for weeks past surging within her against the imprisoning walls of the town rose from her heart to her head, and in a gross moment of exultation she remembered that never before had she looked out to the horizon without seeing these huge mountain-sides barring her view. Now they were passing away, and heedless of Dick's questions she watched the outlines disappearing. She almost trembled in fear that some miracle might stay the increasing darkness, and she could not avoid thinking of Joshua and the sun standing still.

At last, awakening up from her reveries, she said passionately, throwing her arms on his shoulder—

"But you won't desert me? Tell me that you will take me away from this horrible place. I could not bear it when you were gone—I would sooner die."

This was the first time that a direct mention of an elopement had been made. They had both been unconsciously considering the agreeabilities of such an act for some time past, but the consequences thereof had not occurred to either party until the proposition had been put forward in so many words.

"Of course I'll take you away, my dear," said Dick with a distinct vision of the Divorce Court in his mind, "but you know that will mean giving up everything and travelling about the country with us, and I don't know that you will like it."

"You mean that you don't love me enough to take me away," cried Kate frantically. "Oh, I did not think you were so cruel! I thought you loved me better."

Passion and jealousy were now dominant in Kate, and the suspicion of fear that she had at first felt at the thoughts of leaving her home vanished in the rage that her

lover's fancied hesitation had caused her. Clinging about him, she waited for his answer.

"I'll take you away, dear, if you'll come. I never liked a woman as I do you. The train-call is for ten o'clock. We must contrive something. How are you to meet me at the station?"

It was Kate's turn then to hesitate. The knowledge of the power of bearing children forces every woman to look to her home as a bird to its nest. In the highest and lowest ranks this natural instinct is counteracted by circumstances, but the whole life of the middle-class woman tends to confirm it. She is rich enough to possess a home, but too poor to leave it, except on the rarest occasions. Her power begins and ends there; she is unknown beyond it. She may be vile or virtuous, but in either case her good or bad qualities flourish within the threshold of her own door.

And with Kate the ties of home, or rather those of locality were, of course, doubly strong. She had never been out of the Potteries in her life; born, reared, and married she had been here. Beyond the awful circle of the hills all was as vague to her as beyond the sea-banks is to the oyster. And not only was she going away into this unknown region, without hope of ever being able to return again, but she was going there to roam she did not know whither—adrift, and as helpless as a tame bird freed and delivered to the enmities of an unknown land. Half the truth dawned upon her in that moment, and lifting her eyes, she said—

"Oh, Dick! you are asking a great deal of me. What shall I do? Never, never, never to see Hanley again!"

"I didn't know that you cared so much about Hanley. And you accused me just now of not loving you enough to take you away. I think it is you who don't love me."

"Oh, Dick! you know that I love you better than anything in the world! But to give up everything, never to see what you have seen all your life."

"I don't think you will regret it, dear; we'll be very happy. We are going from this to Derby, and from that to Blackpool, a very jolly place by the sea. We'll go out boating and picnicing."

Actors who are not gypsies by nature invariably marry

after a few years of travelling. The monotony of constant change, the incessant veneering of the mind with new impressions, no sooner produced than wiped out, the certain breaking up of all ties that their mechanical hurry from town to town entails, forces the most fickle to long to be, if no more, constant to their heart's desire, and instinctively leads the most volatile to dream of something stable and tangible. For the travelling actor there is no society. He arrives in a strange town: the discomfort of living in a whirl of new lodging-houses he has probably grown accustomed to, but the dreadful hours of inoccupation passed amid fresh scenes and unfamiliar faces remain as burdensome as ever. Many of his "pals" are married; he cannot intrude upon them, and therefore his only amusement or distraction is a chance of conversation in a public-house. These influences had been at work upon Dick for a long time past. Before being placed at the head of the present tour he had been playing heavy leads in Shakespearean revivals. There everybody was married, and Dick had a tiresome time of it. His recent liaison with Miss Leslie, and several still more ephemeral loves with the ladies of the chorus, had interested him for the time being; but nevertheless, the recollections of the family comforts he had been recently witness to remained in his mind, and now that the chance of realizing a nice settled life presented itself he found himself unable to resist availing himself of the occasion. He was sick of being alone. Kate was a very pretty woman, had a nice little soprano voice, and he was sure he'd be able to get her something to do by-and-by. Besides, he was very fond of her, and he was quite sure they'd get on famously together.

This was the substance of his thoughts concerning Kate, and he knew no more about the matter than that he loved her far better than he had any one since his affair with the countess, who had come thirty times to see him play the part of the Indian in the *Octoroon*. Indolent as this man was by nature, he could when the occasion required wake up to fits of the most surprising energy. He had, there being no need for his interference, accepted Kate's affection lazily; but now, the moment there was danger of losing

her, he began to bestir himself. Putting his arms quite around her, with a movement that could not fail to delight a woman, so full was it of softness and protective strength, he said—

"You must not think about it any more, dear. I cannot, I could not, leave this place without you. What is your husband to you when you love me? We shall be happier than you ever dreamed of being. Kiss me, darling."

Kate raised her face to his, feeling then that nothing but this man concerned her in the world.

Behind them were the back-yards of a row of small houses. Two or three girls stood on the doorsteps talking to their admirers, and the print dresses made pale stains in the gloom. Overhead the sky was murky and cold; a few stars shimmered, and a vapid moon struggled through heavy masses of travelling clouds; below an immense sea of purply vapor had filled full the valley. The tide of mist had flowed from the lowest deeps to the highest ridges, and as these were barely defined against the wide gray sky, an exact image of the ocean was produced. But the imitation exceeded the reality in grandeur, for the horizon's line being placed high above the eye, the illusion of unbounded space was perfectly realized. Otherwise the likeness was complete, and so striking was it that even Dick did not fail to perceive it. After a moment's contemplation he said—

"You told me, dear, that you had never the sea; well the view before you is more like it than anything I ever saw in my life; that is to say, as it looks at night."

Kate did not answer at once, but at the end of a long silence she said, "You mustn't laugh at me, dear Dick, but I can't tell you how frightened I am at not being able to see those hills. I have been watching them all my life, and never lost sight of them till now."

For answer Dick kissed her, and again they relapsed into contemplation.

Momentarily the spectacle grew more striking and magnificent. Furnace-fires flashed everywhere through the wide shadow-sea. For miles, on the right, on the left, they sprang into existence, and then remained fixed like stars in

the purple concave of night. In the foreground—that is to say, in the heart of the valley—they were most numerous. There were there separate lights, groups, and constellations, and in lines they wandered over miles of country, becoming scarcer as they ascended the hidden slopes of the hills. Along the ridges they appeared like vessels passing about the horizon of a vast sea. On the left Northwood's sharp back was seen like the rough line of a rocky coast; on the right the lights of Southwark might have been mistaken for a fleet of fishing-boats riding at anchor in a dead calm. The tall stems of the factory chimneys, the bottle-shaped pottery-ovens, the intricate shafts of the collieries, were hidden as deep in the mist as ever a city was in the sea; and had there been stars overhead to account for the multitudinous fires below, this region of man's most ceaseless activity would have appeared as untrodden as any ocean view that any coast-land of the north could show.

In rapt contemplation Kate watched the centres of fire that burst through the evening vapors, as her own desires had burst through the vague dreams that had so long enveloped her life. Like doves seeking a place to rest for the night, her eyes eagerly followed the enigmatic flight of the furnaces. And as these earth-stars mounted towards the sky, her interest in them became more intense; it throbbed in her brain even as did their reverberating lights in the air, and in a sort of palsied amazement she watched them as a child might a glittering flight of strange butterflies making for the sea. She even wondered for their safety. At last a furnace blazed into existence high amid the hills, so high that it must have been on the very last verge. It seemed to Kate, in a wild moment, like a hearth of pleasure and comfort that was awaiting her in a mystic and unimagined country, and for some time her enamored eyes and dreams caressed the distant light; but soon her glance was attracted by another still further away, still higher in the heavens. Then quickly her fancies followed, according themselves to this pale luminary, until she saw it was only a star that had risen above the hills. Humiliated, and half conscious of the indefinite allegory, she sought to fix her interest in the star, but below, only sepa-

rated apparently by a few feet, the earthly light blazed a carnal red as if in answer defiant to the more spiritual pallor of its heavenly sister.

Then Kate forgot her fears for the future. Her passionate hate of the present returned in ten times accentuated force, and without any words of transition she flung her arms upon Dick's shoulder. "Oh, yes, Dick, I'll go with you. Why shouldn't I? Are you not everything to me? I never knew what happiness was till I saw you; I never had any amusement, I never had any love; it was nothing but drudgery from morning to night. Better be dead than continue such an existence. Oh! you don't know what it is. I have been a good wife; I have spent whole nights sitting by Ralph's bedside listening to his wheezing, giving him his medicines; and what did I get for it but coarseness and abuse? I never loved him, and I don't think he ever loved me very much; at any rate, he has never shown it. My mother and his made up the marriage, and I don't know why I consented. Ah, if I hadn't I should be free now, and you might marry me, and we would go away from this horrible place together; far away beyond these hills that I have been watching since I was a child, and that I'm sick of watching. There is a beautiful country far by the sea—at least, I have read there is—and we shall go there. Tell me, Dick, dear, oh my darling! tell me that you'll take me away."

Dick listened calmly and quietly to these passionate beseechings, and taking her in his arms he kissed her fervidly, though somewhat with the air of one who deems further explanation unnecessary. But when he withdrew his face Kate continued, at first plaintively, but afterwards with more passion—

"It is very wicked, I know it is, but I can't help myself. I was brought up religiously, nobody more so, but I never could think of God and forget this world like my mother and Mrs. Ede. I always used to like to read tales about lovers, and I used to feel miserable when they did not marry in the end and live happily. But then those people were good and pure, and were commanded to love each other, whereas I am sinful, and shall be punished for my

sin. I don't know how that will be; perhaps you will cease to love me, and will abandon me. Ah, when you cease to love I hope I shall die. But you will never do that, Dick; tell me that you will not. You will remember that I gave up a great deal for you; that I left my home for you; that I left everything."

Dick could not help thinking that this was a little wearisome. He was very fond of Kate, and she liked him, and they were going away together; so far he knew, so much had been decided, and as far as he could see there the matter ended. Besides, it was getting very late; the third act must be now nearly over, and he had a lot of business to get through. But it was difficult to suggest that they should go home, for Kate, unable to control herself any longer, had burst into tears, and it was necessary to console her.

"Don't cry like that, dear," he said softly, "we shall be far away from here to-morrow, and you will find out then how well I love you."

"Oh! do you really love me? If I were only sure that it was so."

"If I didn't love you, why should I ask you to go away with me? If I didn't love you, could I kiss you as I do?"

These words reassured Kate, and she told passionately how her love had grown upon her.

"Of course we have been very wicked, and you can't respect me very much; but then you made love to me so, and the music made me forget everything. It wasn't all my fault, I think, and you were so different from all the other men I have seen—so much more like what I imagined a man should be, so much more like the heroes in the novels. In the books there is, you know, always a tenor who comes and sings under the windows in the moonlight, and sends the lady he loves roses. You never sent me any roses, 'tis true, but then there are no roses in Hanley. But then you were so kind and nice, and spoke so different, and when I looked at your blue eyes I couldn't help feeling I loved you. I really think I knew—at least I couldn't talk to you quite in the same way as I did to other men. You remember when I was showing you over the rooms, how you

stopped to talk to me about the pious cards Mrs. Ede had hung on the wall. Well then, since then I felt that you liked me. And it was so different since you came to live in the house. I didn't see much of you, you were always so busy, but I used to lie awake at night to hear you come in."

Dick was not in the least averse to hearing himself praised, but he nevertheless found it impossible to forget the accounts he had to go through with the manager before leaving the town, and that his wardrobe had yet to be packed. Where they were to sleep that night he hadn't a notion, but that was a detail. Anyhow, it was clear they were doing no good where they were and he had to get back to the theatre.

"Look here, dear, I know you are very fond of me, so am I of you, but I must get back to the theatre. You have no idea of the business I have to get through to-night, and as we are going away together we'll have to look out for some place to put up."

This necessity for immediate action at once startled and frightened her, and bursting again into a passionate fit of sobbing she exclaimed—

"Oh, Dick! this is a terrible thing you are asking me to do. Oh! what will become of me? But do you love me? Tell me again that you do love me, and that you'll not leave me."

Reassuring her with caresses and kind words, Dick drew her tenderly away, and clasping him for present and future protection, she allowed herself to be led. She did not speak again, and she only once again looked towards the hills, the misty hills that had so silently shadowed and moulded the forms of her thoughts.

Like a river of flame discharging itself into an ocean of fire Northwood blazed. On the right distance had blended and rendered hazy the thousand lights of Southwark, until it seemed like one of the luminous clouds that crown the vomiting mouth of a volcano. The furnace-fires had increased by tens; each dazzling line was now crossed and interwoven with other lines; and through the tears that blinded her eyes, Kate saw an immense sea of fire and beyond nothing but unfathomable gray.

CHAPTER XI

THE morning of the following day was misty, and it threatened rain. Nevertheless bright, hard shafts of sunlight broke occasionally from the gray bondage of the clouds, and danced over the wet tiles of the roofs. One of these escaped rays had found its way through the dull window of a coffee-room. The silver of the cruet-stand sparkled, and a little pool of light slept on a corner of the tablecloth, within a few inches of Kate's impatiently moving fingers.

She looked anxiously at Dick, who, with bent head and shoulders, sat eagerly devouring a fat chop. The meal seemed to her interminable. While she had been unable to do more than crumble a piece of bread and sip a cup of tea, he had been emptying plates of crumpets and racks of toast. Certain that they would never be able to reach the station in time to catch the train, she felt she would go mad if forced to spend another night in Hanley. Her distress of mind fluctuated. After a passionate appeal for haste, her anxiety would slip from her, and she would abandon herself to the delight of dreaming of the time when she would see the landscape passing behind her, feel the wind in her face, and know that she was being carried as fast as steam could take her to a remote country, from whence there is no returning. During these pauses in the conversation Dick chewed the succulent meat greedily, and asked himself if there would be time to put away another plate of fried eggs before ten minutes to ten. To assure himself on this point he had to turn to look at the clock, which was behind him. The movement awaked Kate from her reveries, and a host of nervous fears flashed upon her.

"Oh, Dick, Dick! make haste, I beg of you; you don't know what I'm suffering. Supposing my husband was to come in now and find us here, what should I do?"

"He can't know that we are here; the station is the first

place he'd go to; there's no use hanging about there longer than we can help."

"Oh, dear, I'd give ten years of my life if we were once in the train. And Mrs. Ede, what should I do if I met her? It would be worse than Ralph."

"There's no use exciting yourself like that, dear; I'll see that you don't meet anyone."

"How will you manage that?"

"I'll tell you in the cab. I think on the whole we'd better start now. Luckily we haven't much luggage to delay us. Waiter, bring the bill and call me a cab."

Terrified as she was by the announcement that the station was to be feared as the real point of danger, she nevertheless felt that she would prefer to brave it rather than to patiently wait to be ignominiously captured as she sat watching Dick finishing another plate of eggs and bacon.

"And how will you save me from meeting him should he be there before us?" Kate said to Dick as they drove away.

"I'll leave you in the cab, and I'll cut down and see if he is there."

"Oh, no; I couldn't bear to be left alone in the cab. He might come from behind somewhere and find me when you were gone, and that would be worse than anything. He might kill me, and I should have no one to save me."

Dick made no answer to Kate's frightened fancy. He was, in truth, a little puzzled to know how to act. There was no getting away from the fact that it was only too possible, not to say probable, that they would find Mr. Ede waiting for them. Disguises, secret doors, and remembrances of heroes and heroines who had passed under their watcher's nose without being perceived flashed through the actor's mind; but masks and wigs are not available in railway stations. A recollection of Falstaff reminded him of the wardrobe-baskets, but a moment's reflection convinced him of the impracticability of stowing Kate away in one of these. He dreaded the strength of the bottom, and, besides, what was to be done with the dresses? He then thought of wrapping a railway rug around his newly-acquired wife, and carrying her thus concealed in his arms; but that would not

do either. Mr. Ede would be sure to ask him what he had there—the feet would be sticking out.

Kate, in the meanwhile suffering agonies of mind, watched the great brick roads, vistas of red turning to purple on the left, spaces of pure red on the right, behind them and before them high walls of pale brown melting into ochre-color. The implacable reality of these maddened her; her mind was charged with visions of green fields and dreams of love that was eternal. This would be hers if she could only escape. Oh, to be a few miles away —only a few—and look out of the railway-carriage window and see Hanley fading out of sight! For the moment she knew no regret. The desire of escape and the danger she ran of capture completely dominated her mind, and she was conscious of nothing else. The thoughts of the man and the woman did not run on similar lines, but they tended towards the same point. For, sum the question up as they would, they found themselves still face to face with the still unsolved question of what they were going to do if they met Mr. Ede. At length, after a long silence, Kate said:

"Oh, Dick, dear! what shall I do if we find him waiting on the platform? You will protect me, will you not? You will not desert me! I couldn't go back to him."

"Of course not. Let him take you away from me? Not me! If you don't want to live with him any more you have a right to leave him. If he gives me any of his cheek I'll knock him down."

"You won't do that, will you, dear? Remember how small and weak he is; you'd kill him.

"That's true, so I would. Well, I'm damned if I know what to do; I was never in such a fix in my life. One thing is clear, you'll have to come with me even if he does kick up a row and wants to get you back. It will be deuced unpleasant, and before the whole company too. Don't you think that you could wait a moment in the cab while I have a look round—I won't go far."

"Oh, I'd be too afraid! Couldn't you ask some one to go for you?"

"I'll see who's there," said Dick, twisting his neck to look round the corner. "By Jove! they're all there—Beau-

mont, Dolly Goddard, and that confounded bore Mortimer, and Montgomery. I think I'll ask Montgomery, he's a devilish good chap. We had better stop the cab here and I'll call to him."

Kate consented, and a moment after the musician's immense nose and scarecrow face was poked in the window.

"Hey, old pal, what is it? Waiting—but—I beg——"

"Never mind that," said Dick, laying his hand on the young fellow's arm; "I want you to do me a great favor. I want you to cut down on the platform, and see if there's a little scraggy man about the height of Dubois hanging about anywhere. You can't mistake him: he has a dirty dark beard that grows on his face like a bunch of grass, and he's no chest, little thin shoulders, and he'd have on——"

"A pair of gray trousers, and a red woollen comforter round his neck," whispered Kate, feeling bitterly ashamed.

"All right," said Montgomery, "I'll spot him if he's there. But you know that the train goes in ten minutes or less, and Hayes says that he can't take the tickets, that you have all the coin."

"So I have; I forgot to send it round to him last night. Ask him to step up here, there's a good fellow."

"Now, I bet you Hayes won't be able to get the tickets right. He's perfectly useless, always boozed—nipping you know."

Kate did not answer, and an uneasy silence ensued, which was broken at length by the appearance of a hiccuping, long-whiskered man.

"How are you, o-o-ld man. Eh! who is——? I don't think I have the pleasure of this lady's acquaintance."

"No? Mrs. Ede, Mr. Hayes, our acting manager. Now, look here, Hayes, you go and get the tickets. I can't leave this lady. Thirty-five will do."

"How thirty-five? We travel forty-one."

"You know well enough that thirty-five is what we always get. Damn it, man, make haste."

"Don't damn me. New member of the com-com-pany, eh?"

"I'll tell you all about that after, old man," said Dick, leaning forward and pretending to whisper confidentially.

This satisfied the tippler, who, after pulling his silky whiskers and serving Kate to another blank, drunken stare, hurried off, black bag in hand.

"Confounded nuisance it is to have to deal with a fellow like that. He's perfectly incapable, and he thinks he's such a dab at business—and 'tis for show that he always goes about with the black bag."

Kate wondered how Dick could talk about such things. She was trembling, and her brain throbbed. Leaning back in the cab she placed her hands before her eyes. Two minutes, maybe three, passed; it seemed to her an eternity, and then she heard Montgomery's voice crying,

"'Tis all right. There's no such person there, I'm sure."

Kate felt her mind grow clear, and the strain on her nerves was relaxed. She looked at Montgomery and read in his eye that he was her friend. The glance was as cheering as is the song of a bird amid the wet trees when the storm is over.

"Then get out, dear," said Dick, "we haven't a moment to lose."

Kate jumped out on the pavement, but she hadn't walked a dozen yards before she stopped panic-stricken.

"Mrs. Ede—my mother-in-law—perhaps she is there! Oh, Dick! what shall I do?"

"I know whom you mean. She isn't there. I couldn't mistake, for I know her by sight."

As she hurried towards the station, Kate looked again at Montgomery; their eyes met, and they felt they were signing a sort of compact of friendship. For now that she was really adrift in a new world, amid strange people, the slight fact of his knowing her mother-in-law by sight meant to her what a footprint does to a lost one in a desert.

As they passed through the station they were stared at. Kate was astonished at the number of people. They reminded her of a school. The girls strolled about in groups and couples. Some had paired off with young men. Joe Mortimer stood in the centre of the platform, and harangued a small crowd that had collected round him. Dick smiled and nodded to everybody. Kate felt a little proud

when she perceived he was not ashamed of her. He did not speak to her, but rushed about, dragging her after him, giving orders everywhere. The gray asphalt was strewn with luggage of all kinds—brown portmanteaus and huge white baskets. All were labelled "Morton and Cox's Operatic Company." The baggage-man was shouting at porters, and ladies of the company ran after the baggage-man.

"We shall be off in a minute, dear," Dick whispered softly in her ear, "and then——"

"Whose carriage are you going in, Dick?" said a little stout man who walked with a strut and wore a hat like a bishop's.

"I really don't know: I don't mind; anywhere except with the pipe-smokers. I can't stand that lot."

"Perhaps he's going to take a first-class compartment with hot-water pans," remarked Mortimer.

This little speech was delivered in the usual nasal twang which was supposed to convert the baldest platitudes into the keenest wit, and the little group of admirers all laughed consumedly.

Dick, who overheard what had been said, let his face cloud, and he said, half to himself, half to Kate:—

"What a confounded fool that fellow Mortimer is! I very nearly kicked him into the orchestra at Halifax about six months ago."

"What do they think of me?" replied Kate, very frightened. "I'm afraid they all despise me."

"Oh, nonsense. Despise you? I should like to know what for. But what compartment shall we take? You know we always travel in separate cliques. Let's go with Leslie and Dubois and Montgomery; they are the quietest. Let me introduce you to Miss Leslie. Miss Leslie, Mrs. Ede—a lady I'm escorting to Blackpool."

"I'm afraid you'll find us a very noisy lot, Mrs. Ede," said Miss Leslie, in a way that made Kate feel intimate with her at once.

"Now look here," exclaimed Dick, "you two talk together. I won't go far; I'll be back in a minute, but I must see after Hayes; if I don't he may forget all about the tickets."

Kate was ashamed to stop him; and once he was gone her fears of meeting her husband returned, and the strange faces terrified her. They were of all sorts, and were recognizable by marked similarity. Miss Leslie had a bright smiling face, with clear blue eyes, and a mop of dyed hair peeped from under a prettily-ribboned bonnet, and Kate, notwithstanding her trouble, could not help noticing how beautifully cut were the plaits of her skirt, from under which an arched foot in tightly buttoned leather was constantly advanced. Miss Beaumont sported large diamonds in her ears, and she wore a somewhat frayed yellow French cloak which, she explained to the girls near her, particularly to her pal, Dolly Goddard, was quite good enough for travelling. The friendship between these two no one in the company could understand. The knowing ones declared that Dolly was Beaumont's daughter; others, who professed to be more knowing, entertained other views. Dolly was a tiny girl with crumpled features, who wore dresses that were re-made from the big woman's cast-off garments. She sang in the chorus, was in receipt of a salary of five-and-twenty shillings a week, and was a favorite with everyone. Around her stood a group of girls; they formed a black mass of cotton, alpaca, and dirty cloth. A little on the right half a dozen chorus-men talked seriously of the possibility of getting another drink before the train came up. Their frayed boots and threadbare frock coats would have caused them to be mistaken for street idlers, but that one or two of their number exhibited patent leathers and smart made-up cravats of the latest fashion. Everywhere some contradiction was observed. Dubois's hat gave him the appearance of a bishop, his tight trousers confounded him with a groom. Joe Mortimer made up very well, with his set expression of face, and his long curls, for the actor whose friends once believed he was a genius. But it was Montgomery who had been struck the most decidedly with the trade-mark that had been laid sometimes lightly, sometimes heavily, upon this band of travelling mummers. Although it was clear that they were separated as much by birth as they were by education, as much by fortune as they were by talent, it was nevertheless curious to remark how

they were united by that inexpressible something, that look of unrest, that homeless air, which change of place and fortune imprints upon the human vagrant. There was the same difference between the worthy tradesman walking with his wife at the other end of the platform, and these forty-two wanderers, as there is between the firm land that the peasant tills and the loose sand that the sea-wind blows. Montgomery was a perfect specimen: the very tails of his long Newmarket coat seemed as if they would preclude his frail body from resting long in any one place, just as the down of the dandelion catches the breeze and hurries the floating seed away. His face was generally seen in profile, for he had a knack of leaning his head to the left and right as he talked, and a profile in Montgomery's case meant a long nose and a side view of a *pince-nez*. He spoke of finales and the difficulty he experienced when he first went into an orchestra of beating two in a bar. Even now when he was talking to Kate, who shrank back trembling at the appearance of every fresh face on the platform, he could not divest his conversation of theatrical allusions. Around the unfortunate woman a circle was forming. Only Miss Leslie, little Dubois, who had of course undertaken to put every thing to rights, talked to her; the others stood as near to her as they could, to listen and watch. The news that Dick was running away with a married woman, and that the husband was expected to appear every minute to stop her, had gone about. It had reached even the ears of the chorus-men in the refreshment-room, and they gulped down their beer and hurried back to see the sport. Mortimer declared that they were going to see Dick for the first time in legitimate drama, and that he wouldn't miss it for the world. The joke was repeated through the groups, and everyone was convulsed with laughter. Beaumont alone spoke unkindly, and she whispered, and in whispers that were too audible, that she couldn't understand how Dick was such a fool, that they didn't want a shopwoman travelling with them. These remarks did not, however, meet with much approval, and the fat woman had many indignant glances levelled at her. She did not seem to mind: but when Kate, whose agony of mind had for some time past been growing

intolerable, burst into tears, Beaumont, looking a little ashamed, pressed forward to see and console. Her efforts were however repulsed, and then a very pretty movement of commiseration was visible in the crowd. Miss Leslie pulled out a lace handkerchief which she pressed against Kate's eyes, and in the gray twilight which fell through the dirty glass roofing, the weeping woman walked aside with her new-found friend.

Immediately after a growling noise was heard, and the green-painted engine, enshrouded in its white steam, puffed into sight, and at the same moment, dragging drunken Mr. Hayes along with him, Dick was also seen making his way towards them from the refreshment-room.

Then Kate felt glad, and almost triumphantly she dashed the tears from her eyes. No one now could stop her. She was going away, and with Dick, to be loved and live happy forever. Beaumont was forgotten, and the fierce longing for change she had been so long nourishing now completely mastered her, and, with a childlike impetuosity, she rushed up to her lover, and, leaning on his arm, strove to speak. She could not find words for passion.

"What is it, dear?" he said, bending towards her. "What are you crying about?"

"Oh, nothing, Dick. I'm so happy. Oh! were we once outside this station! Where shall I get in?"

Even if her husband did come, and she were taken back, she thought that she would like to have been at least inside a railway carriage.

"Get in here. Where's Montgomery? Let's have him."

"And, oh! do ask Miss Leslie? She has been so kind to me."

"Oh, yes; she always travels with us," said Dick, standing at the carriage door. "Come, get in, Montgomery, and do make haste, Dubois."

"But where's Bret?" shouted some one.

"I haven't seen him," replied several voices.

"Is there any lady missing?" asked Montgomery.

"No," replied Mortimer in the deepest nasal intonation he could assume, "but I noticed a relation of the chief

banker in the town in the theatre last night. Perhaps our friend has had his check stopped."

Roars of laughter greeted this sally, the relevance of which no one could even faintly guess: and the guard smiled as he said to the porter:

"That's Mr. Mortimer. Amusing is them theatre gentlemen." Then turning to Dick, "I must start the train. Your friend will be late if he don't come up jolly quick."

"Isn't it extraordinary that Bret can never be up to time? Every night there's a stage wait for him to come on for the serenade," said Dick, withdrawing his head from the window.

"Here 'e is, sir," said the guard.

"Come on, Bret; you'll be late," shouted Dick.

A tall, thin man in a velvet coat, urged on by two porters, was seen making his way, with a speed that was evidently painful, down the platform.

"Come in here," said Dick, opening the door and hauling the panting creature into the moving train.

Out of the dim station they passed into the bright air; but it was some time before they got out of the huge ways and embankments of brick that impeded on every side the view. There were long lines of coal-wagons, and others laden with the produce of Hanley—chimney-pots and tiles. These were covered with black tarpaulin, and the impression produced was that of a funeral procession marching through a desert whose color was red. The collieries steamed above their cinder-hills, the factory chimneys belched forth their filthy smoke, and looking at the passing vision Kate strove to feel perfectly glad. For suddenly her joy had been touched by the light, sharp wings of that sorrow which is so completely a part of our nature, that we are conscious of its presence even in bidding good-by to things that we hate; and as she looked out on this world of work that she was leaving forever, she listened at once to the uncertain trouble that mounted up through her mind, and to the voices of the actors talking of comic songs and dances.

Then instinctively she put out her hand to find Dick's. He was sitting beside her, and she felt happy again. At these intimacies none but Frank Bret seemed in the least

surprised, and the laugh that made Kate blush was occasioned by the tenor's stupid look of bewilderment. It was the first time he had seen her, and the story of her elopement he had not yet heard. His glance went from one to the other, vainly demanding an explanation: to increase the hilarity Dick said:

"But, by the way, Bret, what made you so late this morning? Were you down at the bank cashing a check?"

"What are you thinking of? There are no banks open on Sunday morning," said Bret, who of course had not the least idea what was meant.

The reply provoked peals of laughter from all save Miss Leslie, and all possible changes were rung on the joke until it became as nauseous to the rest of the company as to the bewildered tenor, who bore the chaff with the dignified stupidity of good looks.

They were in a third-class railway carriage. Kate sat next the window, with her back to the engine; Dick was beside her, Miss Leslie faced her; then came Dubois and Bret, with Montgomery at the far end.

The conversation, which had fallen to the ground on the expiration of the Sunday check joke, had just been resumed. Dubois was explaining his method of delivering blank verse, much to Bret's and Montgomery's amusement. Dick sought to attract Miss Leslie's attention, and passing his arm around Kate's waist to draw her closer, the three whispered together.

"Now, I want you two to be pals," he said. "Lucy is one of my oldest friends. I knew her when she was so high, and it was I who gave her her first part—wasn't it, Lucy?"

"Yes. Don't you remember, Dick, the first night I played Florette in the *Brigands?* Oh! wasn't I in a fright! And do you remember how you pushed me on the stage from the wings?"

Leslie had a way of raising her voice as she spoke until it ended in a laugh and a display of white teeth. Kate thought she had never seen any one look so nice or heard any one speak so sweetly. In fact she liked her better off the stage than on. The others she did not yet recognize. They

were still to her figures moving through an agitated dream. Leslie was the first to awake to life.

The tendency of Dick's conversation was to wander; but after having indulged for some time in the pleasures of retrospection, returning to the subject in point, he said:

"Well, it's a bit difficult to explain. But, you see, this lady, Mrs. Ede, was not very happy at home, and having a nice voice—you must hear her sing some *Angot*—and such an ear! She never heard the waltz but once, and she can give it note for note. Well, to make a long story short, she thought she'd cut it, and try what she could do with us."

Covered with confusion, Kate appealed to Dick to say no more.

"My dear, everybody in the company," he answered, "knows something about it already. Isn't it better they should know the true story than to have them concocting nonsense?"

"Besides," said Miss Leslie, "what can a woman do if she's unhappy at home but to leave home?"

The philosophy of this remark was very soothing to Kate's feelings, and she murmured:

"You are all very kind; but I'm afraid I've been very wicked."

"Oh my!" said Miss Leslie, laughing, "you mustn't talk like that, you'll put us all to the blush."

"I wonder how such theories would suit Beaumont's book?" said Dick.

Seeing how little she could understand of the ideas and conversation of her present companions, Kate could not help feeling a little miserable. She was the tame sparrow, born and reared in captivity, who, finding the door of its cage open, had spread its tiny wings and was striving to fly with the swallows. She leaned back, and taking no further part in the conversation, listened vaguely to Dick, who explained how he and Kate had left Hanley without a stitch of clothes, and would have to buy everything in Derby. To be able to talk more at his ease he had begged of Bret to move down a bit, and allow him to get next to Leslie.

The tenor, conductor, and second low comedian had spread a rug over their knees, and were playing Nap. They shouted, laughed, and sang, when they made or anticipated making points, portions of their evening music. Kate was left, therefore, to herself, and she looked out of the window.

They were passing through the most beautiful parts of Staffordshire, and she saw, for the first time, the places she had so often read of in her novels. It seemed to her just like the spot where the lady with the oval face used to read Shelley to the handsome baronet when her husband was away doctoring the countryfolk.

The day was full of mist and sun. Along the edges of the woods the white vapors heaved, half concealing the forms of the grazing kine; and the light shadows floated on the grass, long and prolonged, even as the memories that were now filling the mind of this sentimental workwoman. Her heart beat; and, silent with expectation, she savored a joy that was ineffable. It seemed to her that she was now on, or almost on, the threshold of a new life—the life of which she had so long dreamed. Her lover was near her, but ah, why were they not walking together, side by side, in those fair grass-grown places, plucking as they went the wet leaves that brushed across their way? There were birds singing there; but in her imagination the clinking of needles and the rustling of silk were mingled with the loud thrilling of the thrushes. Then forgetting the landscape, with a sigh she set to thinking of what they were saying of her at home.

She knew Mrs. Ede would refuse for a long time to believe; she would have the whole town searched, and when it was no longer possible to entertain a doubt, she would say that Kate's name must not again be mentioned in her presence. Kate asked herself if it would be possible to write and explain. Alas! What could she say? It was terrible to think that the old woman would forever hate and detest her—her whom she had once loved so dearly. As for her husband, Kate felt she did not care quite so much what he thought of her; nor, indeed, could she quite imagine what the attitude of his mind would be. In turn she fancied him swearing, and cursing, and sending the

police after her; and then he would appear to her as a sullen, morose figure, moving about the shop, growling occasionally at his mother, and muttering from time to time that he was devilish glad that his wife had gone away. She would have wished him to regret her; and when she remembered the little girls, she felt the tears rise to her eyes. What explanation would be given to them? Would they too learn to hate her? She thought not; but still they would have to give over coming to the shop—there was no one now to teach them sewing. Her absence would change everything. Mrs. Ede would never be able to get on with Miss Hender, and even if she did, neither of them knew enough of dressmaking to keep the business going. What would happen then? she asked herself sorrowfully. They would not be able to live upon what they sold in the shop—that was a mere nothing. Poor Ralph's dreams of plate-glass and lamps! Where were they now? Mrs. Ede's thirty pounds a year would barely pay the rent. A vision of destruction and brokers passed before her mind, and she realized for the first time the immense importance of the step she had taken. Not only was her own future hidden in the darkest of gulfs, on whose face she could read no sentence, no word, no letter, but that of those she had left behind was, through her, equally plunged in obscurity. All the miseries she had endured were forgotten; she thought only of the kindnesses she had received, of the quiet, certain life she might have led, in and out from the shop to the front kitchen, and up to her workroom. After all, that was her own. Now she had nothing but this man's love. Ah! if she were to lose that! With an effort she swept the thought from her mind and cast upon Dick a look of passionate entreaty.

He immediately responded, and, leaving Miss Leslie, came and sat down by her. The attention was very gratifying, and Kate knew she was blushing with pleasure. Trembling with a mingled sense of fear for the future and love of the present, she laid her hand upon his, and said,

"Oh, Dick! tell me that you love me a little bit, and that you won't leave me."

"Leave you! why aren't we going away together?"

Leslie smiled at the lovers; and moving towards the card-players, she placed her arm round Bret's shoulders and examined his hand. Then the three men raised their heads. Dubois, with the cynicism of the ugly little man who has ever had, both in real and fictitious life, to play the part of the disdained lover, giggled, leered, and pointed over his shoulder. Montgomery smiled too, but a close observer would detect in him the yearnings of a young man from whose plain face the falling fruit is ever invisibly lifted. Bret looked round also, but his look was the indifferent stare of him to whom love has come often, and he glanced as idly at the picture as a worn-out gourmet would over the menu of a table d'hôte dinner.

A moment after all eyes were again fixed on the game, and, unobserved, Dick and Kate talked from their different points of view. She was anxious to hear of his unalterable affection, and she sought in sentimental phrases to explain how definitely her life was bound up in his. He, however, was too deeply interested in thinking of how they were going to manage when they got to Derby, to follow exactly the thread of her argument. There was a very nice lodging where he might take her, but he was puzzled to imagine how he would account for their want of luggage to the landlady. Interrupting her suddenly he said,

"I can give you twenty pounds to fit yourself out. Do you think you could manage with that?"

"Manage with twenty pounds! Of course I could, on half that; you forget I can make my own dresses."

"Yes, but that'd take time, and I'd like you to look a bit neat, and you forget you have to buy everything; a trunk alone will cost you three pounds."

"I'm afraid I'm putting you to a lot of expense, dear."

"Not more than you are worth. You don't know what a pleasant time we shall have travellin' about; it is so tiresome bein' always alone. There's no society in these country towns, but I sha'n't want society now."

"And do you think that you won't get tired of me? Will you never care again for any of these fine ladies?" asked Kate, turning her large voluptuous brown eyes on to Dick

until they drew his lips down to hers. The kiss was delicious, and the fear of being seen by the others, who were all wrangling for the deal, rendered it unutterably thrilling.

In the tunnels which they passed through the temptation to repeat the experiment was irresistible, but owing to Dubois's attempt to light matches it ended in failure. Dick bumped his head severely against the woodwork of the carriage; Kate felt she hated the little comedian, and before she recovered her temper the train began to slacken speed and there were frequent calls from the windows of the different compartments for Dick.

"Is the railway company going to stand us treat this journey?" shouted Mortimer.

"Yes," replied Dick, putting his head out, "seven the last time and seven this; we should have more than a couple of quid."

When the train stopped and a voice was heard crying, "All tickets here!" he said to Dubois, Bret, and Montgomery, "Now then, you fellows, cut off; get Mortimer and a few of the chorus-men to join you; we are seven short."

As they ran off he continued to Miss Leslie, "I hope Hayes won't bungle it; he's got the tickets to-day."

"You shouldn't have let him take them; you know he's always more or less drunk, and may answer forty-two."

"I can't help it if he does; I had something else to look after at Hanley."

"Tickets!" said the guard.

"Our acting manager has them; he's in the end carriage."

"You know I don't want anything said about it; Hayes and I are old pals; but it's a damned nuisance to have an acting manager who's always boozed. I have to look after everythin', even to making up the returns. But I must have a look and see how he's gettin' on with the guard," said Dick jumping up and putting his head out of the window.

After a moment or two he withdrew it and said hastily, "By Jove! there's a row on. I must go and see what's up. I bet that that confounded fool Hayes has gone and done somethin'."

In a minute he had opened the carriage-door and was hurrying down the platform.

"Oh, what is the matter? do tell me," said Kate to Miss Leslie. "I hope he won't get into any trouble."

"It's nothing at all. We never, you know, take the full number of tickets, for it is impossible for the guard to count us all; and besides, there are some members who always run down the platform; and in that way we save a good deal of coin, which is spent in drinks all round."

Kate felt for the moment like one who had been suddenly struck on the head; and in looking at Miss Leslie she could not conquer an invincible feeling of repulsion which crept over her. Since she had been in the train all her sensibilities had been continually shocked. The careless matter-of-fact way with which Leslie had put her arm round Bret's shoulders had forced Kate to recognize more vividly than she would otherwise have done the truth of her own shame, and made her on more than one occasion withdraw her hand from Dick's; and the levity of the conversation, although only half understood, had both confused and frightened her. Had it not been for the absolute presence of her lover, she would have often bitterly regretted her flight from home, and now the affair of the tickets, coming after a day filled with complex and exhausting emotions, conjured up in Kate's imaginative brain visions of thieves and bands of thieves. She was beginning to cry when Miss Leslie said, "You know, dear, there's no cheating in it. The company provides us with a carriage, and it is all the same to them if we travel five-and-thirty or forty-two."

CHAPTER XII

THE rest of the journey was accomplished monotonously. When Hayes' drunkenness had been commented on, and many anecdotes told concerning it, the conversation wandered into a discussion, in the course of which mention was made of actors, singers, theatres, prices of admission, "make-ups," stage management, and music. Montgomery treated little Dubois with scorn when he suggested that there never was an opera like *Les Cloches.* Leslie and Bret were of opinion that it had never been well sung in London; and Dick explained how he would have made all the girls walk in procession if he had had the mounting of the piece in the first instance. The principal towns in England were likewise alluded to. Sheffield was remarkable for the fact that Beaumont had not been able to come on on the first night of the pantomime, owing to the present of a case of "fizz" and an unpleasant letter she had received the same evening; and Mortimer, who was playing a demon, had to keep gagging away until they got a chorus-girl on in her place. As for Birmingham, why it was difficult not to die with laughing, for was it not there that Ashton, Leslie's understudy, had sung the tenor's music instead of her own in the first act of the *Cloches;* and poor so-and-so, who was playing the Grenicheux, how he did look when he heard his B flat go off!

"Flat," murmured Montgomery sorrowfully, "isn't the word. I assure you it loosened every tooth in my head. I broke my stick trying to stop her, but it was no b— good."

Then explanations of how the different pieces had been produced in Paris were volunteered, and the talents of the different composers were passionately discussed; and when Dubois, who Kate began to perceive was the company's laughing-stock, declared that he thought Offenbach too polkaic, all held their sides and roared.

Kate, who did not understand the allusions, nor even the drift of the conversation, could scarcely help looking bewildered, or from time to time timidly putting her hand out to Dick, as if she was afraid he was going to escape from her. She was very glad when the train rolled into Derby.

"How are you, Bill?" said Dick, and addressing a red, pimply-faced man in a round hat. "Do you think we shall do good business? Have you got good places for your posters?"

"Spiffing," answered the man, as he saluted Miss Leslie. "But I couldn't get you the rooms. They are let; and, between ourselves, you'll 'ave a difficulty in finding what you want. This is cattle-show week, you must remember. You'd better come on at once with me. I know an hotel that isn't bad, and you can have first choice—Beaumont's old rooms; but you must come at once."

Kate was glad to see that Mr. Bill Williams, the agent in advance, did not remember her. She, however, recognized him at once as the man who had sent Dick to her house.

"Cattle-show week! All the rooms in the town let!" cried Miss Leslie, who had overheard part of Mr. Williams's whisperings. "Oh dear, I do hope that my rooms aren't let. I hate going to an hotel. Let me out; I must see about them at once. Here, Frank, take hold of this bag."

"There's no use being in such a hurry; if the rooms are let they are let. What's the name of the hotel you were speaking of, Williams?"

"I forget the name, but if you don't find lodgings, I'll leave you the address at the theatre," said the agent in advance, winking at Dick.

"You're too damned clever, Williams; you'll be making somebody's fortune one of these days."

Kate had some difficulty in keeping close to Dick, for the moment he stepped out on the platform he was surrounded. The baggage-man had a quantity of questions to ask him, and Hayes was desirous of re-explaining how the ticket-collector had happened to misunderstand him. Pulling his long whiskers, the acting-manager walked about murmuring, "Stupid fool! stupid darned fool!" There

were, besides, some twenty young women struggling to get a word with the popular fat man. With their little hands laid on his arms they talked pleadingly.

"Yes, dear; that's it," he answered kindly; "I'll see to that to-morrow. I'll try not to put you in Miss Crawford's dressing-room, since you don't agree."

"And, Mr. Lennox, you will see that I'm not shoved into the back row by Miss Dacre, won't you?"

"Yes, dear; yes, dear; I'll see to that too; but I must be off now; and you'd better see after lodgings, I hear that they are very scarce. If you aren't able to get any come up to the Hen and Chickens, I hear they have rooms to let there," said Dick, whose good-nature forced him to help every lame dog over every stile.

"Poor little girls!" he murmured to Williams as they got into a cab, "they only have twenty-five bob a week; one can't see them robbed by landladies who can let their rooms three times over."

"Just as you like," said Williams, "but you'll have the hotel full of them.

Kate longed at that moment to lean her face against Dick's and kiss him. Love and gratitude struggled for mastery in her heart, for she now knew that she could trust him, that he would not desert her and leave her to die of want in the street.

As they drove through the town Dick called attention to the animated appearance of the crowds, inferring thereby an excellent week. Williams explained the advantages of the corners he had chosen, and he pointed to his posters with the air of a painter walking through a gallery with visitors.

At last the cab stopped at the hotel, or rather before the archway of a stone passage some four or five yards wide.

"There's no hotel here!"

"Oh, yes, there is, and a very nice hotel, too; the entrance is a little way up the passage."

It was an old-fashioned place—probably it had been a fashionable resort for sporting squires of the beginning of the century. The hall was wainscoted in yellow painted wood; on the right-hand side there was a large brown press,

with glass doors, surmounted by a pair of buffalo horns; on the opposite wall hung a barometer; and the wide, slowly sloping staircase, with its low thick banisters, ascended in front of the street door. The apartments were, however, not furnished with archæological correctness. A wallpaper of an antique design contrasted with a modern tablecloth, and the sombre red curtains were ill suited to the plate-glass which had replaced the narrow windows of old time. Dick did not like the dust nor the tarnish, but there being no other bed and sitting-room available, a bargain was soon struck, and the proprietor, after hoping that his guests would be comfortable, informed them that the rule of his house was that the street door was barred and locked at eleven o'clock, and would be re-opened for no one. He was a quiet man who kept an orderly house, and if people could not manage to be in before midnight he did not care for their custom. Dick, after having grumbled a bit, remembered that the pubs closed at eleven, and as he did not know any one in the town there would be no temptation to stay out. Williams, who had on convenient occasions been attentively examining Kate, said that he was going down to the theatre, and asked if he should have the luggage sent up. This was decidedly an inconvenient question, and as an explanation was impossible before the hotel-keeper, Dick was obliged to wish Kate good-by for the present, and accompany Williams down to the theatre.

When she found herself alone, she took off her bonnet mechanically, threw it on the table, and sat down in an armchair by the window. Without an effort her thoughts reverted to those at home. Whatever doubt there might have been at first, they now knew that she had left them—and forever. The last three words cost her a sigh, but she was forced to admit them. Uncertainty there could be none now in Ralph's and his mother's mind but that she had gone off with Mr. Lennox. Yes, she had eloped; there could be no question about the fact. She had done what she had so often read of in novels, but somehow it did not seem at all the same thing. This was a startling discovery to make, and Kate tried to think how in her case the ideal did not correspond with the reality. Visions of

slim lords, and clinging Lady Clares, and words of unalterable affection, whispered whilst postilions cracked their whips in sonorous mountain-passes, filled her mind; but around her she only saw a damp, faded room, with stiff mahogany furniture, and she heard only the noisy voices of chorus-girls squabbling in the passages. The world is forever out of tune with our desires, and although her present surroundings were by many times handsomer than those she had left, the sum of inward and outward contradictions remained as evenly balanced as ever. The hazy dream she had dreamed of love and elopement had not been accomplished, and the brutality of every proof of this wounded her sensibilities.

But of the secret of her disappointment she was nearly unconscious; and rousing herself from the torpor into which she had fallen, she hoped Dick would not stop long away. It was so tiresome waiting. Soon, however, Miss Leslie came running upstairs.

"Dinner has been ordered for five o'clock, and we have made up a party of four—you, Dick, myself, and Frank."

"And what time is it now?"

"About four. Don't you think you'll be able to hold out till then?"

"Oh, dear me, yes; I'm not very hungry."

"And anything you want for to-night I'll lend you."

"Thanks, it is awfully kind of you. Would you like to come out for a walk—this room is so dismal."

"Certainly."

Kate wondered why Miss Leslie was so kind to her, and a little pang of jealousy entered her heart when she thought that it might be for Dick's sake. Annoyed by this idea, she watched them during dinner, and was delighted to see that Mr. Frank Bret occupied the prima donna's entire attention. She spoke, it is true, very familiarly with Dick, but for the matter of that so did every one in the company. Even the chorus-girls ventured occasionally to address him by his Christian name. Continually he was plied with all sorts and kinds of questions concerning matters theatrical. Montgomery wanted to know how long it would take, dating from the first rehearsal, to produce a three-act opera.

Beaumont could not remember if a certain burlesque actress had made the acquaintance of her "mug" in '80 or '81. Leslie and Bret, casting languishing glances at each other, discussed eagerly the production of the voice in singing.

Soon after dinner the party dispersed. Some of the men went off to the pubs, some of the ladies thought they would go round and see how the other members of the company were getting on. Dick and Kate went out to walk. As they passed along the streets they deplored that it was Sunday, and that they would not be able to supply themselves with even a brush and comb until the next morning. They would have to buy everything. Stopping under a lamp-post he gave her five-and-twenty pounds and told her to pal with Leslie, that she was the best of the lot. It seemed to her quite a little fortune, and as Dick had to go to London next morning, she sent up word to Miss Leslie to ask if she would come shopping with her. The idea of losing her lover so soon frightened her, and had it not been for the distraction that the buying of clothes afforded her the week she spent in Derby would have been intolerable. She did not know what she would have done. Leslie was, it is true, full of laughter and good-nature. She often came to sit with Kate, and on more than one occasion went out to walk with her. But there were long hours which she was forced to pass alone in the gloom of the hotel sitting-room, and as she sat making herself a strong travelling dress, oppressed and trembling with thoughts, she was often forced to lay down her work. Nothing, she was forced to admit, had turned out as she had expected. Even her own power of loving appeared feeble in comparison to the wealth of affection she had imagined herself lavishing upon him. Something seemed to separate them; even when she lay back and he held her in his arms, she was not as near to him as she had dreamed of being. For in an inexplicable and irritating way the past was mixed up with and dominated the present. Try as she would she found it impossible to wipe out of her mind the house in Hanley. It rose before her, a dark background with touches of clear color, vivid as a picture by Teniers. She saw the little girls work-

ing by the luminous window with the muslin curtains and the hanging pot of greenstuff. She saw the stiff-backed woman moving about with plates and dishes in her hands, and the invalid wheezing on the little red calico sofa. In a word, the past was a tangible reality, the present to her was still as vague as a dream. She could not, do what she would, realize the fact that she had left forever her quiet home in the Potteries, and was travelling about the country with a company of strolling actors. Since she was a child every hour had pointed to an accustomed duty; her life had gone round with the methodical monotony of a clock. But suddenly the instrument had been allowed to run down; now the divisions of the day, which she had always considered immutable as the rising and setting of the sun, remained unmarked. She got up when she pleased; even dined when she liked. This relaxation of discipline prolonged time to an almost infinite extent, and in her unoccupied brain every thought grew distorted, and during the three horrible days that her lover remained away she experienced sensations of trembling and giddiness. The spider that had spun itself from the ceiling did not seem suspended in life by a less visible thread than herself. Supposing Dick were never to return. The thought was appalling, and on more than one occasion she fell down on her knees to pray to be preserved from such terrible misfortune.

But her hours of solitude were not the worst she had to bear. Impelled by curiosity to hear all the details of the elopement, and urged by an ever-present desire to say unpleasant things, Miss Beaumont paid Kate many visits. Sitting with her thick legs crossed, she insinuated all she dared. A direct statement she did not venture upon, but by the aid of a smile and an indirect allusion it was easy to suggest that love in an actor's heart is brief. As long as Miss Beaumont was present Kate repressed her feelings, but when she found herself alone tears flowed down her cheeks, and sobs echoed through the dusty sitting-room.

It was in one of the trances of emotion that Dick found her when he returned. But she was easily consoled, and that night she accompanied him to the theatre. The piece played was *Les Cloches de Corneville,* and, rocked to

rest, she listened for three hours to the melody of the music. Miss Beaumont as Germaine disappointed her, and she could not understand how it was that the Marquis was not in love with Serpolette. But the reality that most grossly contradicted her idea was that Dick should be playing the part of the Bailie; and when she saw her hero fall down in the middle of the stage and heard everybody laugh at him, she felt both ashamed and insulted. The romantic character of her mind asserted itself, and, against her will, forced her to admire and invest with her sympathies the purple-cloaked Marquis. Then her thoughts turned to considering if she would be able to act as did any one of the ladies on the stage. It did not seem to her very difficult. Had not Dick told her that, with a little teaching, she would be able to sing as well as Beaumont? The sad expression that her face wore disappeared, and she grew impatient for the piece to finish so that she might speak to Dick about taking lessons. They were now in the third act, and the moment the curtain was rung down she hurried away, asking as she went the way to the stage-door. It was by no means easy to find. She lost herself once or twice in the back streets, and when she did apply at the right place, the hall-keeper for a long time refused her admittance.

"Do you belong to the company?"

After a moment's hesitation Kate replied that she did not; but that moment's hesitation was sufficient for the porter, and he at once said, "Pass on, you'll find Mr. Lennox on the stage."

Timidly she walked up a narrow passage filled with men talking at the top of their voices, and from thence made her way into the wings. There she was told that Mr. Lennox was up in his room, but would be down shortly.

For a moment Kate could not realize where she was, so different was the stage now to what it had been whenever she had seen it before. The present aspect was an entirely new one.

It was now dark like a cellar, and, in the flaring light that spurted from an iron gas-pipe, the stage-carpenter carried rocking pieces of scenery to and fro. The audi-

torium was a round blank overclouded in a deep twilight, through which Kate saw the long form of a gray cat moving slowly round the edge of the upper boxes.

Getting into a corner so as to be out of the way of the people who were walking up and down the stage, and maturing her plans for the cultivation of her voice, she waited patiently for her lover to finish dressing. This he took some time to do, and when he did at length come downstairs, he was of course surrounded; everybody as usual wanted to speak to him, but, gallantly offering her his arm, and bending his head, he asked, in a whisper, how she liked the piece, and insisted on hearing what she thought of this and that part before he replied to any one of the crowd of friends who in turn strove to attract his attention. This was very flattering, but she was nevertheless obliged to relinquish her plan of explaining to him there and then her desire of learning singing. He could not keep his mind fixed on what she was saying. Mortimer was telling a story at which everybody was screaming, and just at her elbow Dubois and Montgomery were engaged in a violent argument regarding the use of consecutive fifths. But besides these distractions there was a tall thin man who kept nudging away the whole while at Dick's elbow, begging of him to come over to his place, and saying that he would give him as good a glass of whiskey as he had ever tasted. Who this stranger was nobody knew. Dick said he had forgotten who the man was, but that he thought he had met him somewhere up in the North. But the mention of liquor rendered Mortimer and Hayes indifferent to the date of the introduction, and they besought of Dick to come and make a night of it.

"I have been about, gentlemen: I have been in America and I have been in France, and I lead a bachelor life. My house is across the way, and if you'll do me the honor to come in and have a glass with me, all I can say is that I shall be very glad. If there is one thing I do enjoy, it is the conversation of intellectual men, and after the performance of to-night I don't see how I can do better than to come to you for it."

This speech produced a visible effect among the group.

Mortimer, who could not think of anything suitable to say, pretended not to have heard. Dubois settled himself straight, and seemed in doubt whether, to prove his intelligence, he had not better produce his lowest note; Beaumont eyed the stranger sharply, and mentally calculated if he were worth a substantial part of her hotel bill.

"But," he continued gallantly, "if I said just now that I was a bachelor, it is, I assure you, not because I dislike the sex. My solitary state is my misfortune, not my fault, and if these ladies will accompany you, gentlemen, need I say that I shall be charmed?"

A murmur of satisfaction greeted these words. The invitation was accepted forthwith, and the whole party followed the tall thin man to his house. It was a small affair, with a porch and green blinds, such as might be rented by a well-to-do commercial traveller. The furniture was mahogany and leather, and when the sideboard was opened, the acrid odor of tea, and the sickly smells of stale bread and rank butter were diffused through the room; but these were quickly dominated by the fumes of the malt. A bottle of port was decanted for the ladies. Certainly the host did his best for his company. He helped the dirty maid to fetch the glasses, and he insisted on a piece of cold beef being brought up from the kitchen. Then everyone made themselves comfortable. Hayes drank his whiskey in silence. Mortimer, as far as he could, monopolized the conversation, and bored everybody by talking of the regeneration of the stage. Montgomery, with his legs over the arm of an easy-chair, tried to get in a word concerning the refrain of a comic song he had just finished scoring.

During this part of the evening the ladies looked tired, but they showed signs of coming interest when a reference was made to the morality of the leading English actresses. The tall thin man listened with an expression of anxious interest on his face. He seemed to think that it was of the most vital importance that he should not lose the thread of Dubois' argument. The little man, with his bishop's hat tilted over the back of his head, propounded the most strange opinions, until at last, as if to clinch all he had said previously, he stated emphatically that he did not be-

lieve in the virtue of any woman in the world. This brought them all to their feet. Dubois was declared to have insulted the profession. Dick agreed it was damned bad form, and Montgomery, who had a sister-in-law starring in Scotland, turned purple, and refused to be appeased until he was asked to accompany Bret and Leslie in a duet. The thin man (as everybody now called him) said he had never been so much touched in his life, a statement which Beaumont did her best to justify by going to the piano and singing three songs one after another. The third was the signal for departure. Montgomery declared that it was quite enough to have to listen to Beaumont during business hours, and soon after it was discovered that Hayes had fallen asleep. So, bidding the kindest of farewells to their host, whom they hoped they would see the following evening at the theatre, and upholding drunken Mr. Hayes between the lot of them, they stumbled into the street.

It was very hard to get him along. Every ten or a dozen yards he would insist on stopping in the middle of the roadway to argue the value and the sincerity of the friendship his comrades bore for him. Mortimer declared that he would stand in a puddle all night if by so doing he might hope to prove to him the depth of his trusting heart. Dubois said that to sit with him in the cold September moonlight, and talk of the dear days of the past, would be bliss. Striving to understand, Hayes pulled his long whiskers, and stared at them blankly. But the monotony of this sort of joking soon began to be felt, and the ladies proposed they should walk on in front, and leave the gentlemen to get their friend home as best they could. It was then that Dick remembered that the hotel-keeper had told him that he shut his doors at eleven o'clock, and would open them again for nobody before morning.

"What are we to do?" asked Leslie. "It is very cold."

"We'll ring him up," answered Dubois.

"But if he doesn't answer," suggested Bret.

"I'll jolly soon make him answer," said Dick. "Now then, Hayes, wake up, old man, and push along."

"Pou—sh—al—ong! How can—you—talk to me like

that? Yer—yer—shunting me—me—for one of those other fellows."

"We'll talk about that in the morning, old man. Now, Mortimer, you get hold of his other arm, and let's run him along."

Mr. Hayes struggled, declaring the while he would no longer believe in the world's friendship; but everybody being now in earnest, and Montgomery pushing from behind, the last hundred yards were soon got over, and the drunken burden deposited safely against the wall of the passage.

The sky was quite clear overhead, and at the end of the lateral lines of the houses the moon jutted from behind a row of chimney-pots. A stream of light floated over the flagstones, but the buttress under which Hayes was lying threw a long shadow. Going to the bell, Dick gave it a pull, and the whole party listened to the distant tinkling. Then, after a minute or two of suspense, Mortimer said:

"That won't do, Dick; ring again. We shall be here all night."

Clatter, clatter, clatter, went the bell, and a husky voice, issuing from the dark shadow of the buttress, said:

"I rang for another whiskey, waiter, that's all."

The effect was most comical and unexpected, and the whole party roared with laughter. Nothing was seen of the drunkard but his feet, with a bit of white stocking gleaming fiercely in the moonlight.

Then the bell was rung again and again, and whilst one was pulling at the wire, another was hammering away with the knocker. The noise was deafening, but no answer could be obtained, and the actors consulted in silence. Some suggested one thing, some another. Leslie and Bret proposed that they should seek admittance at another hotel; Dubois, that they should beg hospitality of the other members of the company; Montgomery, that they should go back to the theatre. Eventually, Dick's and Mortimer's plan was declared to be the best; it was to beat in the door. The hotel-keeper had no right to lock them out, and they had a perfect right to break into his house. The law on the subject interested them profoundly, and as they searched for a piece

of wood to serve as a ram, the chances they ran of "doing a week" were anxiously debated. However, no piece of wood of sufficient size could be found, much to the relief of the ladies and Dubois, who strongly advised Dick to renounce this door-smashing experiment.

"Oh, Dick! pray don't," whispered Kate. "What does it matter? it will be daylight in a few hours."

"That's all very well, but I tell you he has no right to lock us out; he's a licensed hotel-keeper. Are you game Mortimer? We can burst the door in with our shoulders."

"Game!" said Mortimer, in a nasal note that echoed down the courtyard, "partridges are in season in September. Here goes," and taking a run he jumped with his full weight against the door.

"Out of the way," cried Dick, breaking away from Kate, and hurling his huge frame a little closer to the lock than the comedian had done.

The excitement being now at boiling pitch, the work was begun in real earnest, and as they darted in regular succession out of the shadow of the buttress across the clear stream of moonlight flowing down the flagstones, they appeared like a procession of figures thrown on a cloth by a magic-lantern. Mr. Hayes' white stocking served for a line, and bump, bump, they went against the door. Each effort was watched with different degrees of interest by the ladies. When little Dubois toddled forward, and sprang with what little impetus his short legs could give him, it was difficult not to laugh, and when Montgomery's reed-like shanks were seen passing, Kate clung to Miss Leslie in fear that he would crush his frail body against the door, but when it came to the turn of any of the big ones, the excitement grew intense. Mortimer and Bret were watched eagerly, but most faith was placed in Dick, not only for his greater weight, but for his superior and more plucky way of jumping. Springing from the very middle of the passage he went, his head back and his shoulder forward, like a thunderbolt against the door. It seemed wonderful that he did not bring down the wall as well as the woodwork. The spirit of competition was very great, and a round of applause rewarded each effort. Mr. Hayes, who fancied him-

self in bed, and that the waiter was calling him at some unearthly hour in the morning, shouted occasionally the most fearful of curses from his dark corner. The noise was terrific, and the clapping of hands, shrieks of laughter, and cries of encouragement, reverberated through the echoing passage and the silent moonlight.

At last Dick's turn came again, and enraged by past failures he, putting forth his whole strength, jumped from the white stocking with his full weight against the door. It gave way with a crash, and he was precipitated into the hall.

At that moment the proprietor appeared coming down stairs. He held a candle in his hand, and he looked over the banisters to see what had happened. But everybody made a rush, and picking up Dick, who was not in the least hurt, they struck matches on the wall and groped their way up to their rooms, heedless of the denunciations of the enraged proprietor. He declared that he was going to the police-station—that he would take an action against them.

The poor man was in his dressing-gown, and by the light of his flickering candle he surveyed his dismantled threshold. It was clear that he would have to fasten the place up somehow, and he looked about for the means of doing so, until he at last caught sight of Mr. Hayes' white stocking. As he did so a wicked light gleamed in his eye, and after a few efforts to awake the drunkard he walked to the gateway and looked up and down the street to see if a policeman were in sight. In real truth he was doubtful as to his rights to lock visitors out of their hotel, and did not feel disposed to discuss the question before a magistrate. But what could be said against him for requesting the removal of a drunken man! He did not know who he was, nor was he bound to find out. So argued the proprietor of the Hen and Chickens, and Mr. Hayes, still protesting he did not want to be called before ten, was dragged off to the station.

Next morning the hotel-keeper denied knowing anything whatever about the matter. He had called, it is true, the policeman's attention to the fact that there was a man asleep under the archway, but he did not know that the

man was Mr. Hayes. This statement was of course not believed, and vowing that they would never again go within a mile of his shop, the whole company went to see poor Hayes pulled out before the beak. It was a forty-shilling affair or the option of a week, and in compensation Dick invited last night's party to dinner at a restaurant. They weren't going to put their money into the pocket of that cad of a hotel-keeper. Hayes was the hero of the hour, and he made everybody roar with laughter at the way in which he related his experiences. But after a time Dick, who had always an eye to business, drew his chair up to Mortimer's, and begged of him to try and think of some allusions to the adventures which could be worked into the piece. The question was a serious one, and until it was time to go to the theatre the art of gagging was warmly argued. Dubois held the most liberal views. He said that after a certain number of nights the author's words should be totally disregarded in favor of topical remarks. Bret, who was slow of wit, maintained that the dignity of a piece could only be maintained by sticking to the text, and cited examples to support his opinion. It was, however, finally agreed that Mortimer should say, whenever he came on the stage, "Derby isn't a safe place to get drunk in," and that Dubois should reply, "Rather not."

Owing to these little emendations, the piece went with a scream, the receipts were over a hundred, and Morton and Cox's Operatic Company, having done a very satisfactory week's business, assembled at the station on Sunday morning bound for Blackpool.

Kate and Dick got into a compartment with the same people as before, plus a chorus-girl, who, in the hopes of being allowed to say on the entrance of the duke, "Oh, what a jolly fellow he is!" was making up to Montgomery. Mortimer shouted unintelligible jokes to Hayes, who always went with the pipe-smokers; Dick spoke about the possibility of producing some new piece at Liverpool, and the planks of the carriage trembled with criticism and suggestions. Everybody seemed to be in high spirits but Kate. The events of the last few days had completely bewildered her, and with dizzy and confused thoughts she was

carried forward helpless and inert like a leaf in a storm. She could not realize the actuality of the life around her; the people she saw might be phantoms, so impossible did she find it to force upon herself a consciousness of their existence. Things flew past her so rapidly that they did not produce upon her any of the sensations of living with which she was acquainted. The effect was painful, and it was heavy and obtuse, even as a nightmare. She was weary of the shouting and bawling of the actors, of their conversations which she did not understand, and of the whirling centre of eternal hurry in which they lived. It made her sick to watch them. Dubois, Mortimer, Bret, and the chorus-girl were playing Nap. Dick, Leslie, and Montgomery were singing tunes or fragments of tunes to each other, and talking about "effects."

Then suddenly the conversation changed, and loud grew the lamentations that no money could be saved this trip in the taking of the tickets. Hayes' stupidity was roundly abused, and Dick was closely questioned as to when, in his opinion, it would be safe to try on again their little plant. Instead of answering he leaned back, and gradually a pleasant smile began to trickle over his broad face. He was evidently maturing some plan. "What is it, Dick? Do say like a good fellow," was repeated many times, but he refused to give any reply further than that he was going to see what could be done. This aroused the curiosity of the company, and it grew to burning pitch when the train drew up at a station and Dick began a conversation with the guard concerning the length of time they would have at Preston, and where they would find the train that was to take them on to Blackpool.

"You'll have a quarter of an hour's wait at Preston. You'll arrive there at 4.20, at 35 past you'll find the train for Blackpool drawn up on the right-hand side of the station."

"Thanks very much," replied Dick as he tipped the guard, and then turning his head towards his friends, he whispered, "'Tis as right as a trivet; I shall be back in a minute."

"Where's he off to?" asked everybody.

"He's just gone into the telegraph office," said Montgomery who was stationed at the window.

A moment after Dick was seen running up the platform. His fat shoulders waggled, and his big hat gave him the appearance of an American. As he passed each compartment of their carriage he whispered something in at the window.

"What can he be saying? What can he be arranging?" asked Miss Leslie.

"I don't care how he arranges it as long as I get a drink on the cheap at Preston," said Mortimer.

"That's the main point," replied Dubois.

"Well, Dick, what is it?" exclaimed everybody, as the big man sat down beside Kate.

"The moment the train arrives at Preston we must all make a rush for the refreshment-rooms and ask for Mr. Simpson's lunch.

"Who's Mr. Simpson? What lunch? Oh, do tell us! What a mysterious fellow you are," were the exclamations reiterated all the way along the route. But the only answer they received was, "Now what does it matter who Mr. Simpson is? I tell you he's going to stand us treat at Preston; isn't that enough for you?" Even Kate could get nothing more from her lover. He talked to her about Blackpool, of what a nice place it was, and of how she would enjoy the sea. To have him so devoted to her was delightful, and she wished they would leave off bothering him about Mr. Simpson, and was glad when they arrived at Preston, if only that the incessant questioning might cease.

"Come on, now," said Dick, "eat and drink all you can, and for the life of you don't ask who Mr. Simpson is, but only for his lunch."

This order was at once acted on, and actors, actresses, chorus-girls and men, conductor, prompter, manager, and baggage-man rushed like a school towards the glass doors of the refreshment-room. There they found a handsome collation laid out for forty people.

"Where's Mr. Simpson's lunch?" shouted Dick.

"Here, sir, here; all is ready," replied two obliging waiters.

"Where's Mr. Simpson's lunch?" echoed Dubois and Montgomery.

"This way, sir; what will you take, sir? Cold beef, chicken and ham, or a little soup?" asked half-a-dozen waiters.

The ladies were at first shy of helping themselves and hung back a little, but Dick drove them on, and, the first step taken, they ate ravenously of everything. But Kate, refusing all offers of chicken, ham, and cold beef, clung to Dick timidly.

"But is this paid for?" she whispered to him.

"Of course it is. 'Tis Mr. Simpson's lunch. Take care of what you are sayin'. Tuck into this plate of chicken; will you have a bit of tongue with it?"

Not having the courage to refuse, Kate complied in silence, and Dick crammed her pockets with cakes. But soon the waiters began to wonder at the absence of Mr. Simpson, and had already commenced their inquiries.

Approaching Mortimer, the head waiter asked that gentleman if Mr. Simpson was in the room.

"He's just slipped round to the bookstall to get a Sunday paper. He'll be back in a minute, and if you'll get me another bit of chicken in the meantime I shall feel obliged."

In five minutes more the table was cleared, and everybody made a movement to retire, and it was then that the refreshment-room people exhibited a frantic interest in the person of Mr. Simpson. One waiter begged of Dick to describe the gentleman to him, another besought of Dubois to say at what end of the table Mr. Simpson had had his lunch. In turn they appealed to the ladies and to the gentlemen, but were always met with the same answers. "Just saw him a minute ago, going up the station; if you run after him you're sure to catch him." "Mr. Simpson? why he was here a minute ago; I think he was speaking about sending a telegram; perhaps he's up in the office," &c., &c. The bell then rang, and, like a herd in motion, the whole company crowded to the train. The guard shouted, the panic-stricken waiters tumbled

over the luggage, and running from carriage to carriage, begged to be informed as to Mr. Simpson's whereabouts.

"He's in the end carriage, I tell you, back there, just at the other end of the train."

The seedy black coats were then seen hurrying down the flags, but only to return in a minute, breathless, for further information. But this could not last forever, and the guard blew his whistle, the actors began gagging. And, oh! the singing, the whistling, the cheers of the mummers as the train rolled away into the country, now all agleam with the sunset! Tattoos were beaten with sticks against the woodwork of each compartment. Dick, with his body half out of the window, and his curls blowing in the wind, yelled at Hayes. Montgomery disputed with Dubois for possession of the other window, and three chorus-girls giggled and munched stolen cakes, and tried to get into conversation with Kate. But a shame darker than any she had yet known lay heavily upon her. Love had compensated her for virtue; but what could make amends to her for her loss of honesty? She could break a moral law with less suffering than might be expected from her bringing up, but the sentiment the most characteristic, and naturally so, of the middle classes, is a respect for the property of others; and she had eaten of stolen bread. Oppressed and sickened by this idea, she shrank back in her corner, and filled with a sordid loathing of herself, she longed, as she might to trample on a disgustful thing, to tear this vile page from her memory. When Dick sat down by her she moved instinctively away from him, for even he for the moment, like all else she could feel and see, was horrifying and revolting.

At Blackpool, Mr. Williams's pimply face was the first thing that greeted them. There was the usual crowd of landladies who presented their cards and extolled the comfort and cleanliness of their rooms. One of these women was introduced, and especially recommended by Mr. Williams. He declared that her place was a little paradise, and an hour later, still plunged in black regret, Kate sat sipping her tea in a rose-colored room.

CHAPTER XIII

THAT night in bed Kate cried hysterically, and Dick did not succeed in comforting her until he promised to send a check and settle with the refreshment-room people at once. This made her feel happier, and in a few days, with the facility of a person of weak nature, she began to fall into the ways, and apparently to habituate herself to the manners and morals, of her new life. And for the time being she was conscious of no special pangs of conscience, of nothing beyond the mechanical conviction that she was a very wicked woman, and deserved to be punished. When Sunday came round (they were staying for a fortnight at Blackpool) she went to church, but the words of God inspired her with only a sense of voluptuous sorrow, which was intensified by the knowledge that for her no repentance was possible. The very idea terrified her, and as if to hide herself from it she wrapped herself more determinedly than ever in the sullen and sensual enjoyment of the time.

The morning hours were especially delightful. Immediately on getting out of bed she went into the sitting-room to see after Dick's breakfast. It was laid out on a round table, the one white tint in the rose twilight of the half-drawn blinds. Masses of Virginia creeper, now weary of the summer and ready to fall with the first October winds, grew into the room, and the two armchairs drawn up by the quietly burning fire seemed, like all the rest, to inspire indolence. Kate lingered settling and dusting little rickety ornaments, tempted at once by the freshness of her dressing-gown and the soothing warmth of the room. It penetrated her with sensations of happiness too acute to be durable, and as they mounted to her head in a sort of effervescent reverie, she would walk forwards to the folding doors to talk to Dick of—it did not matter what—it was for the mere sound of his voice that she came; and, in

default of anything better to say, she would upbraid him for his laziness. The room, full of the intimacy of their life, enchanted her, and half in shame, half in delight, she would affect to arrange the pillows while he buttoned his collar. When this was accomplished she led him triumphantly to the breakfast table, and with one arm resting on his knees, watched the white shapes of the eggs seen through the bubbling water. This was the great business of the morning. He would pay twopence a piece to have fresh eggs, and was most particular that they should be boiled for three minutes and not one second more. The landlady brought up the beefsteak and the hot milk for the coffee, and if any friend came in orders were sent down instantly for more food. Such extravagance could not fail to astonish Kate, accustomed as she had been from her earliest years to a strict and austere mode of life. Frequently she begged of Dick to be more economical, but he, who had always lived Bohemian-like on money easily gained, paid very little attention to what she said beyond advising her to eat more steak and put color into her cheeks. And once the ice of habit broken through, she likewise began to abandon herself thoroughly to the pleasures of these rich warm breakfasts, and to look forward to the idle hours of digestion which followed, and the heavy happy dreams that could then be indulged in. Before the tea-things were removed Dick opened the morning paper, and from time to time read aloud scraps of whatever news he thought interesting. These generally concerned the latest pieces produced in London; and, as if ignorant of the fact that she knew nothing of what he was speaking of, explained to her his views on the subject—why such and such plays would and others would not do for the country. Kate, although she only understood half of what was told her, listened with riveted attention; and the flattery of being taken into his confidence was a soft and fluttering joy. In these moments all fear that he would one day desert her died away like an ugly wind; and, with the noise of the town drumming dimly in the distance, they abandoned themselves to the pleasure of thinking of each other. Dick congratulated himself on the choice he had made, and

assured himself that he would never know again the ennui of living alone. She was one of the prettiest women you could see anywhere, and luckily not too exacting. In fact she hadn't a fault if it weren't that she was a bit cold, and he couldn't understand how it was; women were not generally cold with him. The question interested him profoundly, and as he considered it his glance wandered from the loose blue masses of hair to the white satin shoe which she held to the red blaze.

Then the vague expression of Kate's face disappeared, and she frowned slightly. It annoyed her to perceive that he thought of her so. She dreamed of love as independent of the realities of life. She desired an affection that would be ever present, that would exclude all other things—that would be an atmosphere, as it were, to the heart that would soften and harmonize it, even as a mist does a landscape.

These meditations generally ended by Kate going to sit on Dick's knees. Laying her head upon his shoulder she usually murmured:

"Dick, do you think you will always love me as you do now?"

"I'm sure of it, dear."

"It seems to me if one really loves once one must love always. But I don't know how I can talk to you like that, for how can you respect me? I have been so very wicked."

"What nonsense, Kate, how can you talk like that? I wouldn't respect you if you went on living with a man you didn't care about."

"Well, I liked him well enough till you came, dear, but I couldn't then—it wasn't all my fault; but if you should cease to care for me I think I should die. But you won't; tell me that you won't, dear Dick?"

On the words "dear Dick," Kate would press her face against his neck, and clasping him more tightly to her, sob from excess of emotion. Then Dick comforted her, held her hands in his, drew her down towards him for a kiss, and in that kiss it seemed to her that her happiness must last forever, so completely did she belong to her lover, so defended and so concealed were they from the gray

bitterness of the outer world in the sweet sentiment of their rose-colored room.

One morning Montgomery came to see them. Kate jumped off Dick's knee, and settling her skirts with the pretty movement of a surprised woman, threw herself into a chair on the opposite side of the fireplace. The musician had come to speak about his opera, especially the opening chorus, about which he could not make up his mind.

"My boy," said Dick, "don't be afraid of making it too long. There's nothing like having a good strong number to begin with—something with grip in it, you know."

Montgomery looked vaguely into space; he was obviously not listening, but was trying to follow out some musical scheme that was running in his head. After a long silence, he said:

"What I can't make up my mind about is whether I ought to concert that first number or have it sung in unison. Now listen. The scene is the wedding festivities of Prince Florimel, who is about to wed Eva, the daughter of the Duke of Perhapsburg—devilish good name you know. Well then, the flower-girls come on first, scattering flowers; they proceed two by two and arrange themselves in line on both sides of the stage. They are followed by trumpeters and a herald, then come the ladies-in-waiting, the pages, the courtiers, and the palace servants. Very well; the first four lines, you know, 'Hail! hail! the festive day'—that, of course, is sung by the sopranos."

"You surely don't want to concert that, do you?" interrupted Dick.

"Of course not; you must think me an ignoramus. The first four lines are sung naturally in unison; then there is a repeat, in which the tenors and basses are singing against the women's voices. By that time the stage will be full. Well then, what I am thinking of doing is, when I get to the second part you know—'May the stars much pleasure send you, may romance and love attend you,' to repeat, 'May the stars.'"

"Oh, I see what you mean," said Dick, who began to grow interested. "You'll give 'May the stars' first to the sopranos, and then repeat with the tenors and basses?"

"That's it. I'll show you," replied Montgomery, rushing to the piano. "Here are the sopranos singing in G, 'May the stars'—tenors, 'May the stars'; tenors and sopranos, 'Much pleasure send you,' basses an octave lower, 'May the stars—may stars.' Now I'm going to join them together, 'May the stars'——"

Twisting round rapidly on the piano-stool, Montgomery pushed his glasses high up on his beak-like nose, and demanded an opinion. But before Dick could say a word a kick of the long legs brought the musician again face to the keyboard, and for several minutes he crashed away, occasionally shouting forth an explanatory remark, or muttering an apology when he failed to reach the high soprano notes. The love-song, however, was too much for him, and, laughing at his own breakdown, he turned from the piano and consented to resume the interrupted conversation. Then the plot and musical setting of Montgomery's new work was ardently discussed. Frequent mention was made of the names of Offenbach and Hervé. Both were admitted to be geniuses, but the latter, it was declared, would have been the greater had he had the advantage of a musical education. Various anecdotes were related as to how he had achieved his first successes. Dick was very firm on this point, and he disputed violently with Montgomery, who questioned the possibility of a man who could not write down the notes being able to compose the whole score of an opera. It was, he maintained, ridiculous to talk of dictating a finale.

Kate listened, a little bewildered, to these discussions, and she often wondered if she would ever be able to understand what they were talking of. She thought not. The conversation shifted so rapidly that even when she succeeded in picking up the thread of an idea it so soon got entangled with another that she began to despair. But notwithstanding these digressions, constant reference was made to Montgomery's new piece; and when the names of the ladies of the company were being run over in search of one who could take the part of a page, with a song and twenty lines of dialogue to speak, Dick said:—

"Well, perhaps it isn't for me to say it, but I assure you that I don't know a nicer soprano voice than Mrs. Ede's."

"Ho, ho!" cried Montgomery, twisting his legs over the arm of the chair, "how is it I never heard of this before? But won't you sing something, Mrs. Ede? If you have any of your songs here I'll try the accompaniment over."

Kate, who did not know a crotchet from a semiquaver, grew frightened at this talk of trying over accompaniments, and tried to stammer out some apologies and excuses.

"Oh, really, Mr. Montgomery, I assure you Dick is only joking. I don't sing at all—I don't know anything about music."

"Don't you mind her; 'tis as I say, she's got a very nice soprano voice; and as for an ear, I never knew a better in my life. There's no singing flat there, I can tell you. But, seriously speaking," he continued, taking pity on Kate, whose face expressed the agony of shame she was suffering, "of course I know well enough she don't know how to produce her voice; she never had a lesson in her life, but I think you'll agree with me, when you hear it, that the organ is there. Do sing something, Kate."

Kate cast a beseeching glance at her lover, and murmured some unintelligible words, but they did not save her. Montgomery crossed himself over the stool, and, after running his fingers over the keys, said:—

"Now, sing the scale after me—do, re, mi, fa, sol, la, la—that's the note; try to get that clear—se, do!"

Not liking to disoblige Dick, and seeing how little was asked of her, Kate consented to have her voice tried. She sang the scale after Montgomery in the first instance, and then, encouraged by her success, gave it by herself, first in one octave and then in the other.

"Well, don't you agree with me?" said Dick. "The organ is there, and there's no fluffing the notes; they come out clear, don't they?"

"They do indeed," replied Montgomery, casting a warm glance of admiration at Kate; "but I should so much like to hear Mrs. Ede sing a song."

"Oh! I really couldn't——"

"Nonsense; sing the song of 'The Bells' in the *Cloches,*" said Dick, taking her by the arm. She pleaded and argued, but it was no use, and when at last it was decided she was to sing, Montgomery, who had in the meantime been trying the finale of his first act in several different ways, stopped short and said suddenly,

"Oh, I beg your pardon, you are going to sing the song of 'The Bells.' I'll tell you when to begin—now, 'Though they often tell us of our ancient masters.'"

When Kate had finished singing Montgomery spun round, and, bringing himself face to face with Dick said, speaking professionally—

"'Pon my word, its extraordinary how well she does sing. Of course it is a head voice, but could we get a few chest notes you have no idea how different it would sound."

"And hasn't she a good ear; did you ever hear better tune?"

Under this fire of compliments Kate drew back, blushing at once from shame and delight. Never had she heard herself praised before; never had she suspected she was capable of achieving anything worth notice; and the double sensation, whilst it confused her, stung her with a tingling of spiritual pleasure.

"You know I don't pretend to be able to teach singing, but were you under my grandfather for a year or so, I am perfectly certain that Beaumont wouldn't be in the same street with you."

"Yes, but as he isn't here," replied Dick, who always kept an eye on the possible, "don't you think it would be as well for her to learn a little music?"

"I shall only be too delighted to teach Mrs. Ede the little I know myself. I'll come in the morning, and we'll work away at the piano; and you know," continued Montgomery, who began to regret the confession of his inability to teach singing, "although I don't pretend to be able to do what my grandfather could with a voice, still I know something about it. I used to attend all his singing-classes, and am pretty well up in his method, and—and—if Mrs. Ede likes, I shall be only too happy to do some singing

with her; and, between you and me, I think that in a few lessons I could get rid of that throatiness, and show her how to get a note or two from the chest."

"I'm sure you could, my boy; and I shall be awfully delighted with you if you will. Of course we must consider it as a matter of business."

"Oh, nonsense, nonsense, between pals!" exclaimed Montgomery, who saw a perspective of long hours passed in the society of a pretty woman—a luxury which his long nose and scraggy figure prevented him from indulging in as frequently as he desired.

After some further discussion, it was arranged that Montgomery should call round some time after breakfast, and that Dick should then leave them together to work away at do, re, mi, fa. Hamilton's system was purchased, and it surprised and amused Kate to learn that the notes between the spaces spelt "face." But it was in her singing lessons that she took the most interest, and her voice soon began to improve both in power and quality. She sang the scales for three-quarters of an hour daily, and before the end of the week she so thoroughly satisfied Montgomery in her rendering of a ballad he had brought for her, that he begged Dick to ask a few of the "Co." in to tea next Sunday evening. The shine would be taken out of Beaumont, he declared with emphasis. Kate, however, would not hear of singing before anybody for the present, and she gave up going to the theatre in the evening so that she might have two or three hours of quiet to study music-reading by herself. In the morning she woke to talk of Montgomery, who generally came in while they were at breakfast; and when the lesson was over he would often stop on until they were far advanced in the afternoon, and, looking at each other from time to time, they spoke of the next town they were going to, and alluded to the events of their last journey. Kate would have liked, but she felt ashamed, to speak much of Dick; but she listened, interested, to all Montgomery told her of himself, of the difficulties he had to contend against, of his hopes for the future. He spoke a great deal of his opera, and he explained his intentions concerning it. The piano was ever

handy, and he often sprang up in the middle of a sentence to give a practical illustration of his meaning on the instrument. But these musical digressions did not weary Kate, and she judged, to the best of her ability, the different versions of the finale. "Give the public what they wanted," that was his motto, and he intended to act up to it. He had written two or three comic songs that had been immense successes, not to speak of the yards of pantomime music he had composed, and he knew that when he got hold of a good book in three acts that he'd be able to tackle it. What he was doing now was not much more than a *lever de rideau;* but never mind, that was the way to begin. You couldn't expect a manager to trust you with the piece of the evening until you had proved that you could interest the public in smaller work. At this point of the argument Montgomery generally spoke of Dick, whom he declared was a dear good fellow, who would be only too glad to give a pal a lift when the time came. Kate, on her side, longed to hear something of her lover from an outside source. All she knew of him she had learned from his own lips. Montgomery, in whose head all sorts of reveries concerning Kate were floating, was burning to talk to her of her lover, and to hear from her own lips of the happiness which he imagined a true and perfect affection bestowed upon human life. They had talked on all subjects but this. Kate from timidity had not spoken; Montgomery, for fear of wounding her feelings, had avoided it; but they were conscious that the restraint jarred their intimacy. One afternoon Dick suddenly burst in on their *tête-à-tête.* He was in a great hurry, and after some preamble he told them that he had arranged to meet there some gentlemen with whom he had important business to transact. Montgomery took up his hat and prepared to go; Kate offered to sit with the landlady in the kitchen.

"I'm afraid you'll bore yourself, dear," Dick said after a pause. "But I'll tell you what you might do—I shan't be able to take you out to-day. Why not go for a walk with Montgomery?"

"I shall be delighted; I'll take you for a charming walk up the hill, and show you the whole town."

Kate had no objection to make; so, bidding the manager good-by, they started off on their excursion. Montgomery wore a long Newmarket coat, the tails of which flapped about his legs as he strode forward. Kate was dressed in a brown costume, trimmed with feathers to match; a small bonnet crowned the top of her head, and her face looked adorably coquettish amid the big bows into which she had tied the strings. Her companion was very conscious of this fact, and with his heart full of pride, he occasionally jerked his head round to watch the passers-by, doubting at the same time if any were as happy as he.

As the Lennoxes lived high up in the town in an outlying street amid the sandhills, it took five minutes' walk to reach the Sea Road. Blackpool is an airy and wide town, and it bears the same relation to the other towns of Lancashire as the seventh day does to the other six of the week. It is the huge Lancashire Sunday, where the working classes of Accrington, Blackburn, Preston, and Burnley, during a week or a fortnight of the year, go to recreate themselves. A sense of decorum always reigns in the streets; they are built with large pavements, so that jostling may be avoided. There are many open spaces where people may loiter and congregate; the bonnets exhibited in the plate-glass windows are obviously intended for holiday wear, and it is easy to see freshly-painted walls and bright mahogany, though the strings of the spick and span green Venetian blinds be closely drawn. By the sea the mock Elizabethan gables show an attempt at taste; but they only line the lengthy Sea Road like an endless procession of well-to-do tradespeople dressed out in their Sunday best. They were then gaudy notes of red color set on a dead blue eastern sky.

On the left, twenty feet below, is a long strand, over which the two spider-legged piers crawl at a low tide, and beyond the villas a high headland crowns the ocean with a cap of green. After about ten minutes' walk they began to leave the town behind them; a wide waste of scrubby land lay in front of them.

"Do you know that the fellow who owns that building has made a fortune?" said Montgomery, pointing to the

roofs which began to appear above the edge of the common.

"Did he really?" replied Kate, trying to appear interested.

"Yes; he began with a sort of shanty where he sold ginger-beer and lemonade. It became the fashion to go out there, and now he's got dining-rooms and a spirit license. We went up there last week, a lot of us, and we had such fun; we went donkey-riding, and Leslie got such a fall. Did she tell you of it?"

"No; I have scarcely spoken to her for the last few days."

"How's that? I thought you were such friends."

"I like her very much; but she's always on the stage at night, and I don't like—I mean I should like—but I don't know that she would like me to go and see her."

"And why not, pray?"

This question was embarrassing, and Kate did not answer for some time. At last, raising her eyes, and as suddenly casting them down, she said—

"Well, I thought she mightn't like me to come and see her, because I'm—well, on account of Dick."

"Oh, what nonsense! There's nothing between them now; that's all over ages ago, and she's dead nuts on Bret."

Kate had now been nearly a fortnight with the actors; but as she had lived from timidity almost apart, little had as yet come under her observation which had let her into the secret of their manners and morals. Dick had scarcely spoken to her on the subject. She had, therefore, not yet learned that in the society she was in no opprobrium was attached to the fact of a woman having a lover, and she still innocently supposed that because she had left her husband Leslie might not like to associate with her. To learn, then, that she had only replaced another woman in Dick's affections came upon her with a very sudden shock, and it was the very suddenness of the blow that saved her from half the pain; for it was impossible for a woman who saw in the world nothing but the sacrifice she had made for the man she loved, to realize the fact that Dick's love of her was a toy that had been taken up, just as love of Miss Leslie was a toy that had been laid

down. It did not occur to her to think that the man she was living with might desert her, nor did she experience any very cruel pangs of jealousy; she was more startled than anything else by the appearance of a third person in the world which for the last week had seemed so entirely her own.

"What do you mean?" she said, stopping abruptly. "Was Dick, then, in love with Miss Leslie before he knew me?"

Seeing his mistake, Montgomery colored and strove to improvise excuses.

"No," he said, "of course he wasn't really in love with her; but we used to chaff him about her; that was all."

"Why should you do that, when she was in love with Bret?" said Kate harshly.

Montgomery, who dreaded a quarrel with Dick as he would death, grasped at a bit of truth to help him out of his difficulty, and, trembling with excitement, he answered eagerly—

"But I assure you Bret and Leslie's affair only began a couple of months ago. When we first went out on tour there was nothing between them, and then we joked Dick about her just to vex him. If you don't believe me, you can ask the rest of the company.

To this Kate made no reply, and with her eyes upon the ground she remained for some moments thinking. The light and matter-of-course way in which her companion spoke of the affections troubled her exceedingly, and very naively she asked herself if it were possible that the people she was with saw no sin living together. In the meanwhile Montgomery watched her, and he considered what phrases were best to employ to convince her that Dick had never been Miss Leslie's lover. After a long silence he said,

"Really it is too bad to be taken up in that way. There's always a bit of chaff going on; but if it were all taken for gospel truth I don't know where we should be. I give you my word of honor that I don't think he ever looked twice at her; anyhow, he didn't hesitate between you, nor could he, for, of course, you know you are a fifty times prettier woman."

Kate answered the flattery with a delightful smile, and Montgomery thought that he had nearly convinced her. But the young man was deceived by appearances. He had succeeded more in turning the current of her thoughts than in persuading her.

"You seem to think very lightly of such things," she said, raising her brown eyes with a look that melted her face to a heavenly softness.

Montgomery did not understand, and she was forced to explain. This was difficult to do, but, after a slight hesitation, she said,

"Then you really do believe that Miss Leslie and Mr. Bret are lovers?"

"Oh, I really don't know," he said hastily, for he saw himself drawn into a fresh complication; "I never pry into other people's affairs. They seem to like each other, that's all."

It was now Kate's turn to see that indiscreet questions might lead to the quarrels she was most anxious to avoid, and they walked along the breezy common in silence. In the foreground a dozen donkey-boys who had been fortunate enough to secure clients belaboured their animals with sticks and strove to frighten them with shouts. The sails of a windmill were seen turning over the crest of a hill, and, nearly lost in the dim horizon, a factory chimney or two smoked. On the left, the cliff took a sheer dip of fifty feet down to the long, uncovered reaches which stretched away for miles and miles; glistening patches of water, weedy wastes of stone filled full with the white wings of sea-gulls, touched here and there with the black backs of the shrimp-fishers. The sea was a hazy, distant streak, and the dome of the sky immense.

"How beautiful the country is! I didn't know what it was like till lately. I never was out of Hanley before. How I should like to live here always by the sea! And how strange it is that it should go and come like that! I had never seen it till the day before yesterday as it is now, and Dick was so amused, for I thought it was going to dry up. The morning after our arrival here we sat down by the bathing-boxes on the beach and listened to the waves. They

roared along the shore. It was very wonderful. Do you not think so?"

"Yes, indeed I do. When I was here before, I spent one whole morning listening to the waves, and their surging suggested a waltz to me. This is the way it went," and leaning on the rough paling that guarded the precipitous edge, Montgomery sang his unpublished composition. "I never got any farther," he said, stopping short in the middle of the second part; "I somehow lost the character of the thing; but I like the opening."

"Oh, so do I. I wonder how you can think of such tunes. How clever you must be!"

Montgomery smiled nervously, and he proposed that they should go over to the hotel to have a drink. The sweet face of the woman enframed in the infinite and misty spaces of sea and sky was overpowering, and he had to struggle with his feelings as he would against the persuasiveness of a narcotic. It seemed impossible not to betray himself, and he strove not to look eagerly at her—at the richness of the black velvety tresses, and the still complexion filled with the delicate greens of an ostrich egg, and modelled as delicately. The last few days had accomplished almost miraculous changes in Kate. The strong air breathed in her walks along the seashore, and the underdone beefsteaks eaten in the morning, had rendered her organism, as it were, joyous, and in this material existence the woman became singularly beautiful. A little of the rapidly circulating blood flowed to her cheeks, and tinted them with hues more tender than the rarest carnations can boast of. The shadows and signs of work and unrest disappeared; the draggings of the skin and the too incisive lines of the features—all that marks age in a woman—melted and cleared away. Her figure, which had threatened to turn angular, now commenced to swell like a budding flower into delicate roundnesses, and as she leaned on the rail the flesh of her arms in one or two places distended the seams of her dress.

"Oh, I don't like to go up there," she said after examining for some moments this hillside bar-room. "Look at all the men there are before the door."

"What does it matter? We'll have a table to ourselves. Besides, you'd better have something to eat, for now we are out we may as well stay out. There's no use going back yet awhile. Dick may have to ask those men to lunch."

Kate debated within herself if she should accept or refuse, but Montgomery talked so rapidly of his waltz—of whether he should call it the "Wave," the "Seashore," or the "Cliff," that he did not give her time to collect her thoughts, and they were soon within a few yards of the porch.

"I can't go in there," she said; "why, it's only a public-house."

"Oh, nonsense; everybody comes up here to have a drink. It is quite the fashion."

The men round the doorway stared at her, and Kate felt bitterly ashamed; but seeing some of their own chorus-girls coming from where the donkeys were stationed, in the company of young men with high collars and tight trousers, she ran into the bar-room.

"Now you see what a scrape you have led me into. I wouldn't have met those people for anything."

"What does it matter? If it were wrong do you think I'd bring you in here? You ask Dick when you get home."

A doubt of the possibility of Dick thinking anything wrong clouded Kate's mind, and Montgomery ordered sandwiches and two brandies and sodas. Horror of a public-house, since her childhood, had been vigorously impressed on Kate's mind; and she had always been taught to consider as the most degraded of human beings the dark-shawled and crumpled-bonnetted women who slide out of the swinging doors to slink down an alley. It astonished her, therefore, to hear Montgomery say that he saw no more harm in having a drink and a bite in a pub than anywhere else. The point was argued passionately, but it did not prevent them from enjoying themselves. The sandwiches were excellent, and Kate, who had scarcely tasted anything but beer in her life, thought the brandy and soda very refreshing. When she had finished Montgomery tried to persuade her to try a "split" with him, but she answered

laughing, that if she did he would have to take her home in a carriage. The question then came of how to get out of the place, and after much hesitation and conjecturing, they slipped out the back way through the poultry-yard and stables.

In front of them was a very steep path which led to the sea-strand. Large masses of earth had given way, and these had formed ledges which, in turn, had somehow become linked together, and down these it was just possible to climb.

"Do you think you could manage?" he said, holding out his hand.

"I don't know; do you think it dangerous?"

"No, not if you take care; but the cliff is pretty high; it would not do to fall over. Perhaps you had better come back across the common by the road."

"And meet all those girls?"

"I don't see why you should be afraid of meeting them," said Montgomery, who was secretly anxious to show the chorus that if he were not the possessor, he was at least on very intimate terms with this pretty woman.

"Oh no, no! I wouldn't meet them for the world, and coming out of a public-house, too! I don't see why we shouldn't come down this way. I am sure I can manage it if you will give me your hand and go first."

The descent then began. Kate's high-heeled boots were hard to walk in, and every now and then her feet would fail her, and she would utter little cries of fear, and lean against the cliff's side. It was delightful to reassure her, and Montgomery profited by those occasions to lay his hands upon her shoulders and hold her arms in his hands. Below them lay the blank, wide reaches of the sea; above them a dome of misty sky. No human creature was in hearing or in sight, and solitude seemed to unite them and the mimic danger of the descent to endear them to each other. The quiet and enchantment of earth and air melted into her thoughts until she enjoyed a perfect bliss of unreasoned emotion. He, too, was conscious of the day, and his happiness, touched with a diffused sense of desire, was intense, even to a savor of bitterness. Like all young men, he

longed to complete his youth by some great passion, but out of horror of the gross sensualities with which he was always surrounded, his delicate artistic nature took refuge in a pseudo-platonic affection for his friend's mistress. It was an infinite pleasure, and could it have lasted forever he would not have thought of changing it. To take her by the hand and help her to cross the weedy stones; to watch her pretty stare of wonderment when he explained that the flux and reflux of the tides were governed by the moon; to hear her speak of love, and to dream what that love might be was enough.

Along the coast there were miles and miles of reaches, and to gain the sea they were obliged to make many detours. Sometimes they came upon long stretches of sand separated by what seemed to them to be a river, and Montgomery often proposed that he should carry Kate across the streamlet. But she would not hear of it, although, on one occasion, she did not refuse until he had placed his arms around her waist. Escaping from him she ran along the edge, saying she would find a passing-place. Montgomery pursued, amused by the fluttering of her petticoats; and they both stopped like disappointed children when, after a race of twenty or thirty yards, they found that their discovered river was only a long pool that owned no outlet to the sea.

"Well, never mind," said Kate; "did you ever see such beautiful clear water? I must have a drink."

"You have no cup," he said, turning away so that she should not see him laughing. "You might manage to get up a little in your hands."

"So I might. Oh what fun! Tell me how I am to do it."

Very gravely he made her kneel on the firm sand, and having showed her how to hollow her hands, he waited to enjoy the result of his joke. And forgetful that the sea was salt she lifted the brine to her lips; but when she spat out the horrible mouthful and turned on him a questioning face, he only answered that if she didn't take care she would be the death of him.

"And didn't ums know the sea was salt, and did ums

think it very nasty, and not half as nice as a brandy-and-soda."

Kate watched him for a moment, and then her face clouded, and pouting her pretty lips she said:

"Of course I don't pretend to be as clever as you, but if you had never seen the sea until a week ago you might forget."

"Yes, yes, for—for—get that it—it was not as nice as brandy-and-soda," cried Montgomery, holding his sides.

"I wasn't going to say that, and it was very rude of you to interrupt me in that way."

"Now come, don't get cross. You should understand a joke better than that," he replied, for seeing the tears in her eyes he began to fear he had spoiled the delight of their day.

"I think it is unkind of you to laugh at me and play tricks on me like that," said Kate, trying to master her emotion. The tears stood in her eyes.

Then as they walked under the pale sunset, Montgomery broke long and irritating silences by apologizing for his indiscretion, but until they arrived at a place where a little boy and girl were fishing for shrimps, Kate did not answer him. Here there was quite a little lake, and amid the rocks and weedy stones the clear water flowed as it might in an aquarium. The light from above decorated the liquid surface with the most delicate opal tints, and the reflections of the children's plump limbs in the water were adorable.

"Oh, how nice they look! What little dears!" exclaimed Kate, but as she pressed forward to watch the children her foot dislodged a young lobster from the corner of rock in which he had been hiding.

"That's a lobster," cried Montgomery.

"Is it?" cried Kate, and she pursued the ungainly thing, which sought vainly for a crevice.

After an animated chase, with the aid of her parasol she caught it, and was about to take it up with her fingers when Montgomery stopped her.

"You had better take care; it will pretty well nip the fingers off you."

"You aren't joking?" she asked innocently.

"No, indeed I'm not; but I hope you don't mind my telling you."

At that moment their eyes met, and Kate, seeing how foolish she had been, burst into fits of laughter.

"No, no, no, I—I don't mind your telling me that—that a lobster bites, but——"

"But when it comes to saying sea-water is not as nice as brandy-and-soda," he replied, bursting into a roar of merriment, "we cut up rough, don't we?"

The children climbed up on the rocks to look at them, and it was some time before Kate could find words to ask them to show what they had caught. The little boy was especially clever at his work, and regardless of wetting himself, he plunged into the deepest pools, intercepting with his net at every turn the swiftly crawling shrimps who vainly sought to escape him. His little sister, too, was not lacking in dexterity, and between them they had filled a fairly-sized basket. Kate examined everything with an almost feverish interest. Long gluey masses of seaweed she tore from the rocks and insisted on carrying home; the mussels she found on the rocks interested her profoundly, and concerning a dead starfish she questioned the little shrimp-fishers for several minutes. They looked at her in amazement, evidently thinking it very strange that a grown-up woman should ask such questions. Finally, however, the little boy showed her what she was to do with the lobster. He wedged the claws with two bits of wood, and attached a string whereby she might carry it in her hand. Montgomery affected to be much amused by her innocence, but in truth he knew very little more of the sea than did his companion.

At moments expressions of patient beatitude passed over their faces. For him, whose life was spent in the dark twilight of rehearsals, whose sun was the gas at night, whose fields were a cloth of green baize, and who breathed but the odors of size, violet-powder, and dust; for her, whose life had been spent in the glare of red brick walls, whose sky had been over a smoke-cloud, whose fields had been spaces of black cinders, this long and odoriferous sea-

shore, ventilated by the rose-tinted evening sky, was a mysterious and luminous revelation.

With delicate *gourmandise* they abandoned themselves to thinking of their happiness, and in silences that were only interrupted by occasional words they picked their way along the strand.

Kate thought of Dick—of what he was doing, of what he was saying. She saw him surrounded by men; there were glasses on the table. She looked into his large, melancholy blue eyes, and dreamed of when she would sit again on his knees and explain to him for the hundredth time that love was all-sufficing, and that he who possessed it could possess nothing more. Montgomery was also thinking of Dick, and for the conquest of so pretty a woman the dreamy-minded musician viewed his manager with admiration. The morality of the question did not appeal to him, and his only fear was that Kate would one day be deserted. "If so," he then thought, and not without a certain exaltation of the senses, "I must support her." Such a duty appeared to him an imparadised dream, and to realize it he thought of the music he would have to compose—songs, all of which would be dedicated to her. After a long silence she said:

"Have you known Dick a long time?"

"Well, yes, two or three years or so," replied Montgomery, a little abashed at a question which sounded at that moment like a distant echo of his own thoughts, "Why do you ask?"

"For no very particular reason, only you seem such great friends."

"Yes, I like him very much, he's such a dear good fellow, he'd divide his last bob with a pal."

The conversation then came to a pause. Both suddenly remembered how they had set out on their walk determined to seek information of each other on certain subjects. Montgomery wished to hear from Kate how Dick had persuaded her to run away with him; Kate wanted to learn from Montgomery something of her lover's private life—if he were faithful to a woman when he loved her, if he had been in love with many women before. As she considered how she would put her questions a gray cloud passed over

her face, and she thought of Miss Leslie. But just as she was going to speak Montgomery interrupted her. He said:

"You did not know Dick before he came to lodge in your house at Hanley, did you?"

Kate raised her eyes with a swift and startled look, but being anxious to speak on the subject she replied, speaking very softly:

"No, never; and perhaps it would have been well if he had never come to my house."

There was not so much insincerity in the phrase as may at first appear. Nearly all women consider it necessary to maintain to themselves and to others that they deeply regret having sinned. The delusion at once pleases and consoles them, and they cling to it to the last.

"I often think of it," said Montgomery. "It appears to me such a romantic story, that you who sat all day and mi —mi—" he was going to say minded a sick husband, but for fear of wounding her feelings he altered the sentence to "and never, or hardly ever, left Hanley in your life, should be going about the country with us."

Kate, who guessed what he had intended saying, answered:

"Yes, I'm afraid I've been very wicked. I often think of it, and you must despise me. That's what makes me ashamed to go about with the rest of the company. I'm always wondering what they think of me. Tell me, do tell me the truth, I don't mind hearing it. What do they say about me? Do they abuse me very much?"

"Abuse you? They abuse you for being a pretty woman, I suppose, but as for anything else, good heavens! they'd look well! Why, you are far the most respectable one among the lot. Don't you know that?"

"I suspected Beaumont was not quite right, perhaps; but you don't mean to say there isn't one? Not that little thing with fair hair who sings in the chorus?"

"Well, yes, they say she's all right. There are one or two perhaps; but when it comes to asking me if Beaumont and Leslie are down on you for leaving your husband! Oh, that's too good!" and Montgomery burst out laughing.

This decided expression of opinion was grateful to Kate's

feelings, and the conversation might have been pursued with advantage, but seeing an opportunity of speaking of Dick, she said:

"But you told me there was nothing between Mr. Bret and Miss Leslie."

"I told you I didn't know whether there was or not; but I'm quite sure there never was between her and Dick. You see I can guess what you are trying to get at."

"I can scarcely believe that. Now I think of it, I remember she was in his room the night of the row, when he turned me out."

"Yes, yes; but there were a lot of us. The principals in a company generally stick together. It is extraordinary how you women will keep on nagging at a thing. I swear to you that I am as certain as I stand here there was never anything between them. Do let us talk of something else."

They had now wandered back to the fine pebbly beach, to within a hundred yards of the pier; and above the high cliff they could just see the red chimney-stacks of the town. Some women were collecting their towels which had been left to dry on the stones. A bathing-machine offered a convenient seat.

"Let us sit here," said Kate, seating herself on one of the shafts; "I'm a little tired."

Montgomery placed himself beside her.

Far away beyond the wet stretches of sand and slimy rocks, beyond the shrimp-fishers and the congregating gulls, a luminous line indicated the beginning of the sea. One boat made a black stain on the shimmering mist which rose high into the sky simplyfying it to a simple flat gray tint. The sun sank, a blushing patch of light, and looking through the grim legs of the skeleton pier, the water lazily flapped to gold, the one note of color in this gray sea-piece. Montgomery sang his waltz softly over, but before he arrived at the second part his thoughts wandered, and he said:

"Have you heard anything of your husband since you left Hanley?"

The abruptness of the question made Kate start; but she was not offended, and she answered:

"No, I haven't. I wonder what he'll do?"

"Possibly apply for a divorce. If he does, you will be able to marry Dick."

A flush of pleasure passed over Kate's face, and when she raised her eyes her look seemed to have caught some of the brightness of the sunset. But it died, even as the light above, into gray gloom, and she said, sighing:

"I do not suppose he would marry me."

"Well, if he wouldn't there are lots who would."

"What do you mean?" asked Kate simply.

"Oh, nothing; only I should think that any one would be glad to marry you," the young man answered, hoping fervidly that she would not repeat the conversation to her lover.

"I hope he will; for if he were to leave me, I think I should die. But tell me—you will, won't you? for you are my friend, are you not?"

"I hope so," he replied constrainedly.

"Well, tell me the truth; do you think he can be constant to a woman? Does he get tired easily? Does he like change?"

Kate laid her hand on Montgomery's shoulder, and looked pleadingly in his face.

"Dick is an awful good fellow, and I'm sure he couldn't but behave well to anyone he liked—not to say loved; and I know that he never cared for anybody as he does for you; he as much as told me."

Kate's smile was expressive of pleasure and weariness, and after a pause, she said:

"I hope what you say is true; but I don't think men ever love as women do. When we give our heart to one man, we cannot love another. I don't know why, but I don't believe that a man could be quite faithful to a woman."

"That's all nonsense. I'm sure that if I loved a woman it would not occur to me to think of another."

"Perhaps you might," she answered; and, unconsciously comparing them with Dick's jovial features, she examined intently the enormous nose and the hollow, sunken cheeks. Montgomery wondered what she was thinking of, and he half guessed that she was considering if it were possible

that any woman could care for him. To die without ever having been able to inspire an affection was a fear that was habitual to him, and often at night he lay awake, racked by the thought that his ugliness would ever debar him from attaining this dearly desired end.

"Were you ever in love with anybody?" she asked, after a long silence.

"Yes, once."

"And did she care for you?"

"Yes, I think she did at first. We used to meet at dinner every day; but then she fell in love with an acrobat—I suppose you would call him an acrobat—I mean one of those gutta-percha men who tie their legs in a knot over their heads. The child was deformed. Oh, I was awfully cut up about it at the time, but it is all over now."

The conversation then came to a pause. Kate did not like to ask any further questions, but as she stared vaguely at the pale sun setting, she wondered what the acrobat was like, and how a girl could prefer a gutta-percha man to the musician. As the minutes passed, the silence grew more irritating, and the evening colder. The sun, as it descended, slipped into large flat masses of mist, from which it peeped only occasionally, like a golden ghost or an aureoled face at a window. On the right, looking over the pier, a deep blue curtain of cloud was being drawn by the wind across the yellow and rose-tinted spaces. On the left a sea-fog was gathering, and the high grass-grown promontory from whence they had come was now hardly visible—it was momentarily disappearing.

"I'm afraid we shall catch a chill if we remain here much longer," said Montgomery, who had again begun to sing his waltz over.

"Yes, I think we had better be getting home," Kate answered dreamily.

After some searching, they found a huge stairway, cut for the use of bathers in the side of the cliff, and up this feet-torturing path Montgomery helped Kate carefully and lovingly.

CHAPTER XIV.

FROM Blackpool Morton and Cox's opera company proceeded to Southport, and, still going northward, they visited Newcastle, Durham, Dundee, Glasgow, and Edinburgh. But in no one town did they remain more than a week. Every Sunday morning, regardless as swallows of chiming church-bells, they met at the station and were whirled as fast as steam could take them to new streets, lodging-houses, and theatres. To Kate this constant change was at once wearying and perplexing, and she often feared that she would never be able to habituate herself to her new mode of life. But on the principle that we can scarcely be said to be moving when all around is moving in a like proportion, Kate soon learned to regard locality as a mere nothing, and to fix her centre of gravity in the forty human beings who, bound to her by the light ties of opera bouffe, were wandering with her. For wherever she went her life remained the same. She saw the same faces, heard the same words. Were they likely to do good business, was debated when they got out of the train; that they had or had not done good business was affirmed when they got into the train. Soon even the change of apartments ceased to astonish her, and she saw nothing surprising in the fact that her chest of drawers was one week on the right and the following on the left-hand side of her bed. Nor did she notice after two or three months of travelling whether wax flowers did or did not decorate the corners of her sitting-room, and it seemed to her of no moment whether the Venetian blinds were green or brown. The dinners she ate were as good in one place as in another; the family resemblance which slaveys bear to each other satisfied her eyes, and the difference of latitude and longitude between Glasgow and Aberdeen she found did not in the least alter her daily occupations.

Montgomery came to see her every morning, and the

tunefulness or untunefulness of the piano was really all that reminded them of their change of residence. From twelve until three they worked at music, both vocal and instrumental. During these hours Dick generally sought for excuses to absent himself, but when he returned he always insisted that Montgomery should remain to dinner. All formalities between them were abolished, and Kate did not hesitate to sit on her lover's knees in the presence of her ungainly music-master. But he did not seem to care, he only laughed a little nervously. Kate sometimes wondered if he really disliked witnessing such familiarities. In her heart of hearts she was conscious that there were affinities of sentiment between them, and during the music lessons they talked continually of love. The sight of Montgomery's lanky face often interrupted with a feeling of repugnance the sweetest currents of emotion, but he could sympathize and follow her where Dick could not. And to lean her head on her hand and listen to him playing were moments of divine abandonment inexpressibly dear, and to hear him talk of the operas he hoped to compose produced in her delightful sensations of enthusiasm. Few are there to whom anything but material advantages and pleasures are comprehensible; but Kate could in a vague and fragmentary way enjoy what the French call "une jouissance de tête." And as a plant that has been dying for days in a dark cellar, when exposed to the air, will in a sickly sort of gaiety lift up its poor leaves to the light, this faculty which for years had been crushed out of sight now began to assert itself.

Montgomery was as light to Kate, and soon he became almost as necessary to her spiritual happiness as her lover was to her material. He was so kind, so gentle, and he allowed her to talk to him as much as she liked of Dick. Indeed he seemed quite as much interested in the subject as she was. It was always Dick, Dick, Dick. He told her anecdotes concerning him—how he had acted certain parts; how he had stage-managed certain pieces; of supper parties; of adventures they had been engaged in. These stories amused Kate, although the odor of woman in which they were bathed, as in an atmosphere, annoyed and troubled

her. As if to repay him for his kindness, she, in her turn, became confidential, and one day she told him the story of her life. It would, she said, were it taken down, make the most wonderful story-book ever written. Beginning at the beginning, she gave rapidly an account of her childhood, accentuating the religious and severe manner in which she had been brought up, until the time she and her mother made the acquaintance of the Edes. There it was necessary to hesitate. She did not wish to tell an absolute lie, but was yet desirous to convey the impression that her marriage with Mr. Ede had been forced upon her; but Montgomery had already accepted it as a foregone conclusion. With his fingers twisted through his hair, and his head thrust forward in the position in which we are accustomed to see composers seeking inspiration depicted, he listened, passionately interested; and when it came to telling of the mental struggle she had gone through when struggling between her love for Dick and her duty towards her husband, Montgomery's face, under the influence of many emotions, straightened, and contracted. He asked a hundred questions, and was anxious to know what she had thought of Dick when she saw him for the first time. She told him all she could remember. Her account of the visit to the potteries proved very amusing, and in fits of laughter, she made Montgomery swear he would never breathe a word before she told him of their fall amid the cups and saucers.

"Oh, the devil! Was that the way he cut his legs? He told us that he had forgotten his latchkey, and that he had done it in getting over the garden-wall."

Running his hand over the piano, Montgomery begged of Kate to continue her story; but as she proceeded with the analysis of her passion the events became more and more difficult to narrate. It was necessary to employ many words and many circumlocutions of phrase to tell how she went down in the one dark night to open the street-door to Dick. And yet it was essential to do this so that the whole blame should fall on him. She alluded vaguely to violence and to force. Then Montgomery's face darkened and he protested against his friend's conduct.

To Kate it was consoling to meet some one who thought

she was not entirely to blame, and the conversation came to a pause.

"And now I am going about the country with you all, and am thinking of going on the stage."

"And will be a success, too—that I'll bet my life."

"Do you really think so? Do tell me the real truth; do you think I shall ever be able to sing?"

"I'm sure of it."

"Well, I'm glad to hear you say so, for it is now more necessary than ever."

"How do you mean? Has anything fresh happened? You are not on bad terms with Dick, are you? Tell me."

"Oh! not the least! Dick is very good to me; but if I tell you something you promise not to mention it?"

"I promise."

"Well, we were—I don't know what you call it—summoned, I think—by a man before we left Blackpool to appear in the Divorce Court."

For nearly half a minute they looked at each other in silence; then Montgomery said—

"I suppose it was after all about the best thing that could happen."

This answer surprised Kate. "Why," she said, "do you think it is the best thing that could happen to me?"

"Because when you get your divorce you will, if you play your cards well, be able to get Dick to marry you."

Kate made no reply, and for some time both considered the question in silence. She wondered if Dick loved her sufficiently to make such a sacrifice for her: Montgomery reflected on the best means of persuading his friend "to do right by the woman." At last he said:

"But what did you mean just now when you said that it was more necessary than ever that you should go on the stage?"

"I don't know, only that if I am going to be divorced I suppose I had better see what I can do to get my living."

"Well, it isn't my fault if you aren't on the stage already. I have been trying to induce you to make up your mind for the last month past."

"Oh, the chorus! that horrid chorus! I never could

walk about before a whole theatreful of people in those red tights."

"What nonsense you do talk! There's nothing indecent in wearing tights. Our leading actresses play in travestie. In *Faust* Trebelli Bettini wears tights, and no one, I'm sure, can say anything against her."

Between the three, friend, mistress, and lover, this was a constant subject of discussion. All sorts of arguments had been adduced, but none of them had shaken Kate's unreasoned convictions on this point. A sense of modesty, inherited through generations, rose to her head, and a feeling of repugnance, that seemed almost invincible, forbade her to bare herself thus to the eyes of a gazing public. But although inborn tendencies cannot be eradicated, the will that sustains them can be broken by force of circumstances, and when, at the close of innumerable reasonings, Dick declared that the thirty shillings a week she would thus earn would be a real assistance to them, her resolutions began to fail her. In reality the manager had no immediate need of the money, but it went against his feelings to allow principles, and above all principles he could not but think absurd, to stand in the way of his turning over a bit of coin. Besides, as he said, "How can I put you into a leading business all at once? No matter how well you knew your words, you'd dry up when you got before the footlights. You must get over your stage fright in the chorus. On the first occasion I'll give you a line to speak, then two or three, and then when you have learned to blurt them out without hesitation we'll see about a part."

These and similar phrases were dinned into her ears, until at last the matter got somehow decided, and the London costumier was telegraphed to for a new dress. When it arrived a few days after, the opening of the package caused a good deal of merriment. Dick held up, and before Montgomery, the long red stockings as Kate called the tights. She hid her face in her hands and fled into the next room. But it was too late now to retract. The dress looked beautiful, and tempted on all sides, she consented to appear that night in *Les Cloches*. So at half-past six, with her bundle under her arm, she walked down to the

theatre. Dick had not allotted to her a dressing-room, and to avoid Miss Beaumont, who was always rude, she went of her own accord up to number six. An old woman opened the door to her, and when Kate had explained what she had come for, she said:

"Very well, ma'am. I'm sure I don't mind; but we are already eight in this room, and have only one basin and looking-glass between the lot. I'm afraid you won't be very comfortable."

"Oh! that won't matter. It may be only for to-night. If I'm too much in the way I'll ask Mr. Lennox to put me somewhere else."

On that Kate entered. It was a long, narrow, white-washed room, smelling strongly of violet-powder and clothes. Nobody had as yet arrived, and, awaiting the wearers, the dresses lay spread out on chairs. Kate examined, and involuntarily she calculated that she would not be able to take an order for a costume like the one before her for less than four pounds. It was one of the peasant-girls' dresses—a short calico skirt, trimmed with wreaths of wild flowers. She thought it charming, and she expressed her regret that she could not exchange the page's attire she was being shown how to put on for one of the others. These opinions were considered surprising by the dresser, who informed Kate that the ladies generally preferred men's clothes to women's.

"And as regards the tights," added the old woman, "you'd have to wear them just as well with peasant-girls' frocks as with these trunks, for the skirts, as you can see, only just come below the knees."

At this moment the conversation was interrupted by the clattering of feet on the rickety staircase. Immediately after the door was suddenly opened, and with loud words two girls entered. Kate had often spoken to them in the wings, and when a few questions had been asked she was surprised to find that her determination to go on the stage elicited no other remark than that it was odd she hadn't got tired of sitting at home long ago.

Then more women arrived, and a general stripping began. Bosoms and raised arms glistened, making a faint

note of pink on the pallor of the whitewashed wall; water was heard splashing, and the flat, sickly smell of soapsuds filled the heated air. Three voices shouted at once for the dresser, who had begun to lose her head. One lady could not find her tights, another insisted on the body of her dress being laced up at once, the third failed to make herself understood. The looking-glass was in great requisition, and a girl who was still in her chemise quarrelled furiously with another attired in breastplate and helmet. But these comical contrasts could not take away the animal repulsiveness of the scene.

At once horrified and bewildered, Kate withdrew her chair as far out of reach as possible of the flying petticoats and the scattered boots and shoes. She hated everything, and, much as she feared the inspection of her person that would take place when she got downstairs, she was glad when the call-boy knocked at the door and shouted—

"Ladies! ladies! Mr. Lennox is waiting; the curtain is going up."

"All right! all right!" cried an octave of treble voices, and those who were ready, tripping over their swords, hurried downstairs, leaving the others screaming at the dresser, who was vainly attempting to tidy the room.

When Kate got on the stage the first person she saw was the very one she wished most to avoid—Montgomery. After having conducted the overture he had come up to find out the reason of the "wait." Dick was rushing about, declaring that if this ever occurred again half-a-crown would be stopped out of all the salaries. The noise in front was deafening.

"Oh! how very nice we look! and they are not a bit thin," exclaimed Montgomery, pushing his glasses up on his nose; and, forgetting his difficulties as if by magic, Dick smiled delightfully, and, holding her at arm's length, he looked at her critically all over.

"Charming, my dear! There won't be a man in front who won't fall in love with you. But I must see where I can place you."

All the rest passed as rapidly as in a dream, and before she could again think distinctly she was walking round the

stage in the company of a score of other girls. Treading in time to the music, they formed themselves into lines, making place for Leslie, who came running down to the footlights. But Kate had neither ears nor eyes for anything. She felt that everyone was gazing at her. One old gentleman in a box annoyed her excessively; with his opera-glasses fixed upon her he remained immovable. Twenty times she asked herself when he would look the other way, and she sought for a position in which he would not be able to see her face. Then, remembering that it was possibly only her legs that interested him, from very shame she grew nervous. Once she caught Montgomery's eyes, and not knowing what was passing in her mind, he laughed. She hated him for it. But soon the cue for an exit came, and they were marched into the wings. There she was jostled and stared at, and she remembered, and with anger, how disgusting all these women had seemed to her when she stood behind the scenes for the first time. Now she was one of them.

These were, however, rare moments; there was no time for thinking; she was whirled along. Between the acts she had to rush upstairs to put on another dress; between the scenes she had to watch to know when she had to go on. Sometimes Dick spoke to her, but he was generally far away, and it was not until the curtain had been rung down for the last time that she got an opportunity of speaking to him.

As they walked home up the dark street when all was over, she laid her hand affectionately on his arm—

"Tell me, Dick, are you satisfied with me? I have done my best to please you."

"Satisfied with you?" replied the big man, turning towards her in his kind, unctuous way, "I should think so; you looked lovely, and your voice was heard above everybody's. I wish you had heard what Montgomery said. I'll give you a line to speak when you have got a bit of confidence. You are a bit timid, that's all."

These words of praise from the man she loved brought the color to Kate's face. It had been her intention to ask him to allow her to give up the idea of accepting the stage

as a vocation, but now, through mingled feelings of vanity and dislike to interrupt the peace and pleasure of the moment, she maintained a silence that grew momentarily more cowardly and uneasy. Above all things, she did not wish to annoy, to disappoint him, and when he spoke of the time when she would be a leading actress, she listened delighted, imagining not the plaudits of the public, but the illimitable love he would bestow upon her when she had achieved the successes he had so glowingly depicted. And of these he spoke until the early hours of morning. Dick was as insatiable a talker as he was an eater, and when the cold meat had been devoured, lying back in an armchair, smoking interminable cigarettes, he recounted his opera bouffe adventures. They appeared to be inexhaustible, and by easy transitions he passed from one story to another. At one moment he was telling of how he found himself, when he had the Olympic Theatre in London, two days before the opening night, unable to pay the gas. At such times the difficulties of raising a hundred quid are immense, and the conditions of the capitalist were—that his mistress was to play one of the leading parts at a high salary, and that he was to take over the bars. That was thirty pounds a week gone; and the woman sang so fearfully out of tune that she got hissed, and that settled the piece. Kate clasped her hands, but Dick puffed at his cigarette, interested only to know if it were still alight. Once being assured on this point, he proceeded without delay to sing most of the principal airs and choruses and explain the different situations. A casual reference to the dresses led up to a detailed account of how he had bought the satin down at the Docks at the extraordinary low price of two shillings a yard. This in turn prepared the way for a long story concerning a girl who had worn one of these identical dresses. She was now a leading London actress, and every step of her upward career was gone into. Then followed several biographies. Charlie —— sang in the chorus. He was now a leading tenor. Miss —— had married a rich man on the Stock Exchange; and so on. Indeed, everybody in that ill-fated piece seemed to have succeeded except the manager himself. But no such

criticism occurred to Kate. Her heart was swollen with admiration for the man who had been once at the head of all this talent, and the rich-colored future he would shape for her flowed hazily through her mind. She grew, as it were, a little drunk with stories, and laying her hand on his, all suffering and past sorrow slipped from her in sensations that were calm and benedictive. Never had an evening appeared to her so thorough, so complete, and she looked down an endless perspective of similar evenings spent listening by his side—evenings in which the quietude should never be broken except by the sound of a kiss or the striking of a match wherewith to light a fresh cigarette.

And as the days passed, Kate grew happier, until she began to think she must be the happiest woman living. Her life had now an occupation, and no hour that went pressed upon her heavier than would a butterfly's wing. The mornings had always been delightful; Dick was with her then, and the afternoons had been taken up with her musical studies. It was the long evenings she used to dread; now they had become part and parcel of her daily pleasures. They dined about four, and when dinner was over it was time to talk about what kind of house they were going to have, to fidget about in search of brushes and combs, the curling-tongs, and to consider what little necessaries she had better bring down to the theatre with her. At first it seemed very strange to her to go tripping down these narrow streets at a certain hour—streets that were filled with people, for the stage and the pit entrance are always within a few yards of each other.

Very soon now touches of Bohemianism appeared in her. Her face lost its meekness of expression, her walk became more undulating and lazy; and the passers-by whispered as she went by, "She's one of the actresses." The first time she heard the words she grew frightened, but her fear soon subsided, and nervously she wondered what they thought of her as she hurried from them towards the stage. Once safely there she often turned round to look, and hoped as she gave her name to the hall-keeper that they admired her sufficiently to come to the theatre to see her. One day she found a letter waiting for her, and not sus-

pecting what was in it, she tore open the envelope in presence of half-a-dozen chorus girls who had collected in the passage. A diamond ring fell on the floor, and in astonishment Kate read:

"Dear Miss D'Arcy,—In recognition of your beauty and the graceful way in which you play your part, I beg to enclose you a ring, which I hope to see on your finger to-night. If you wear it on the right hand I shall understand that you will allow me to wait for you at the stage-door. If, however, you decide that my little offering suits better your left hand, I shall understand that I am unfortunate.

(Signed) "An Admirer."

"Who left this here?" asked Kate of the doorkeeper.

"A tall young gent—a London man I should think by the cut of him, but he left no name."

"A very pretty ring, anyhow," said a girl picking it up.

"Not bad," said another; "I got one like it last year at Sheffield."

"But what shall I do with it?" asked Kate.

"Why, wear it, of course," answered two or three voices simultaneously.

This very simple way of settling the difficulty horrified her, and feeling very much like one in possession of stolen goods, she hurried on to the stage, intending to ask Dick what she was to do. She found him disputing with the property-man. Throwing herself between them, and drawing her lover by main force away, she begged of him to advise her. But it was some time before Dick could bring himself to forget the annoyance that a scarcity of daggers had occasioned him. At last, however, with a violent effort of will, he took the note from her hand and read it through. When he had mastered its contents a good-natured smile illumined his chub-cheeked face, and he said:

"Well, what do you want to say? I think the ring a very nice one; let's see how it looks on your hand."

She felt as if her life was sinking away from her. Was this all? Was there then nothing wrong or right in the world? she asked herself, feebly.

"You don't mean, do you, that I am to wear it?"

"And why not? I think it is a very nice ring," said the manager, unaffectedly.

"Why not, indeed?" she murmured to herself, and so stunned was she that in her bewilderment she would have asked him on which hand she was to wear it had he not said:

"Wear it first on one hand and then on the other, dear; that will puzzle him."

"But supposing he comes to meet me at the stage door?"

"Well, what will that matter? We'll go out together; I'll see that he keeps his distance."

Relieved to find that there was a point which she was not asked to pass, she went up to the dressing-room. A volley of questions greeted her. Most of the girls were undressed. Dolly Goddard was walking about in a pair of blue silk stockings. Obeying an instinct of shame which habit did not seem able to destroy, Kate started as if she were about to retreat.

"Now then, come in, don't be shocked," cried Dolly; "you are as bashful as an undergraduate."

A roar of laughter greeted this sally, and, humiliated, she began to dress.

"You haven't heard Dolly's story of the undergraduate?" shouted a girl from the other end of the room.

"No, and don't want to," replied Kate, indignantly. "The conversation in this room is perfectly horrible. I shall ask Mr. Lennox to change me. And really, Miss Goddard, I think you might manage to dress yourself with a little more decency."

"Well, if you call this dress," exclaimed Dolly, fanning herself, "I suppose one must take off one's stockings to please you. You are as bad as——"

Dolly was the wit of No. 6 dressing-room, and having obtained her laugh she sought to conciliate Kate. To achieve this she began by putting on her tights.

"Now, Mrs. Lennox," she said, "don't be angry; if I have a good figure I can't help it. And I do want to hear about the diamond ring."

This was said so quaintly, so, what the Americans would call cunningly, that Kate couldn't help smiling through her anger, and abandoning her hand she allowed Dolly to examine the ring.

"I never saw anything prettier in my life. It wasn't an undergra—?" said the girl, who was a low comedian at heart and knew the value of repetition. "I must drink to his health. Who has any liquor? Have you, Vincent?"

"Just a drain left," said a fat girl, pulling a flat bottle out of a dirty black skirt, "but I'm going to keep it for the end of the second act."

"Selfishness will be your ruin," said Dolly. "Let's subscribe to drink the gentleman's health," she added, winking at the bevy of damsels who stood waiting, their hands on their hips. It being impossible for Kate to misunderstand what was expected of her she said—

"I shall be very glad to stand treat. What shall it be?"

This was a difficult matter to decide. Some were in favor of brandy, some of gin. Eventually it was agreed that they could not do better than a bottle of whiskey. The decrepit dresser was given the money, with strict injunctions from Dolly not to uncork the bottle. "We can do that ourselves," the girl added, facetiously. And until the arrival of the liquor a noisy interest was manifested in the ring, the sender, and the letter. Kate told what Dick had advised her to do, and Dolly spoke authoritatively on the invariable line of conduct pursued by Beaumont in such cases. But this clatter and talk did not silence Kate's qualms of conscience. The method of an antecedent life, the teaching of years, rose in revolution and denied her right to act thus. For a moment a sense of shame, bitter and blinding as a wild salt wind, overwhelmed her, and she could not repress a positive loathing of herself. Since she had left Hanley it was the strongest shock her moral nature had received. Vainly she searched for an excuse, but could find none. It was not until she had drunk a couple of whiskeys that she began to forget and find courage to laugh at Dolly's dirty stories. The number of glasses was not sufficient, but that did not matter, and the merriment did not cease until the call-boy was heard crying, "Ladies, ladies! Mr. Lennox is waiting on the stage." Then there was a scramble for the glass and the dresser, and Dolly's voice was heard screaming—

"Now then, Mother Hubbard, have you got the sweet-

stuff I told you to get? I don't want to go downstairs stinking of raw spirit."

"I couldn't get any," said the old woman, "but I brought two slices of bread; that'll do as well."

"You're a knowing old card," said Dolly. "Eat a mouthful or two, it'll take the smell off, Mrs. Lennox. But I'm afraid you've had a drop too much. You aren't used to it. Open the window, Mother Hubbard."

"It is the heat," answered Kate faintly. "I shall be all right in a minute."

"For goodness sake, do. Mr. Lennox will kick up such a row with me should he find it out. Eat another piece of bread if you can, there's nothing like it."

At present Kate was only a little giddy, but when she got on the stage, with the fumes of the gas, a vague sickness mounted to her head. Montgomery's arms, as he beat time in the orchestra, seemed to her of immeasurable length, and the auditorium reeled, a confused mixture of lights and black spots. The music sounded in her ears like some harsh cruelty, and at times the voices of those singing round her became as unmerciful as the howling of demons mocking her out of the depths of some meaningless nightmare. Each clash of the cymbals seemed more pitiless than the last, and she had at last to stagger into the wings and ask for a glass of water. Fortunately, Dick was on the O. P. side, and did not notice her absence, and beyond some sly laughs and whispering among the girls, the accident attracted no attention. Whether she wore the ring on her left or on her right hand she had no idea, and when Dick asked during their walk home if she had noticed anyone watching her from a stage-box, she could give no answer. But it mattered little; a few days later she was a hundred miles away, playing to new faces and attracting fresh admirations. The incident consequent to a theatrical career was soon blunted and its identity submerged in a thousand other events, and the most lasting trace it left was the ambition to become an actress. The phrase of the letter which complimented her on the graceful way in which she went through her part remained in Kate's mind,

and henceforth she did not cease to beg of Dick to give her "something to do."

It is extraordinary to see how quickly a lady gets on in her profession when she has convinced the heads of the departments of her talents or her beauty. The way in which subordinate parts are discovered that would just suit her is surprising. To this principle Dick and Montgomery proved no exceptions. Soon it became apparent that the first scene in *Les Cloches* played very short, a few extra lines written into it to be spoken by one of the girls would improve it vastly. The scrip was obtained from the prompter, Montgomery invited to supper, and until three in the morning he and Dick collaborated. Kate sat in the armchair and wondered.

What can she say to the Baillie? The scene is the seashore near Corneville; they are on their way to the market.

"Supposing she said something like this, eh? 'Mr. Baillie, do you like brown eyes and cherry lips?' And then another would reply, 'Cherry brandy most like.'"

"No, I don't think the public—you must remember we are not playing to a London public—would see the point. I think we'd better have something broader."

"Well, what?"

"Well, you remember the scene in *Chilperic* when——"

In the explanation of the scene in *Chilperic* the conversation wandered, and Mr. Diprose's version of the piece and his usual vile taste in the stage management severely commented on. In such pleasant discussion an hour was agreeably spent; but at last the sudden extinguishing of a cigarette reminded them that they had met for the purpose of writing some dialogue. After a long silence Dick said—

"Supposing she were to say, 'Mr. Baillie, you have a fine head.' You know I want something she'd get a laugh with."

"If she said the truth, she'd say a fat head," replied Montgomery with a laugh.

"And why shouldn't she? That's the very thing. She's sure to get a laugh with that—'Mr. Baillie, you have a

fat head.' Let's get that down first. But what shall she say after?"

Here both authors came to an embarrassing pause, and in silence they ransacked their memories of all the opera bouffes they had seen for a joke which could be fitted to the one they had just discovered.

After some five minutes of deep consideration, Dick, wearied by the unaccustomed mental strain put upon his mind, said:

"Do you know the music of *Trone D'Ecosse?* Devilish good. If the book had been better it would have been a big success."

"The waltz is about the prettiest thing Hervé has done."

This expression of opinion led up to an animated discussion, in which the rival claims of Hervé and Planquette were forcibly argued. Many cigarettes were smoked, and not until the packet was emptied did it occur to them that, up to the present, only one "wheeze" had been found.

"I never can do anything without a cigarette; do try to find me one in the next room, Kate, dear. Listen, Montgomery, we have got 'Baillie, you've a fat head.' That'll do very well for a beginning; but I'm not good at finding wheezes."

"And then I can say, 'Baillie, you've a fine head,'" said Kate, who had been listening dreamily for a long time, afraid to interrupt.

"Not a bad idea," said Dick. "Let's get it down."

"And then," screamed Montgomery, as he perched both his long legs over the arm of his chair, "she can say, 'I mean a great head, Mr. Baillie.'"

For a moment Dick's eyes flashed with the light of admiration, and he seemed to be considering if it were not his duty to advise the conductor that his talents lay in dialogue rather than in music. But his sentiments, whatever they may have been, disappeared in the burst of inspiration he had been waiting for so long.

"We can go through the whole list of heads," he exclaimed triumphantly. "Fat head, fine head, broad head, thick head, massive head—yes, massive head. The Baillie will appear pleased at that, and will repeat the phrase, and

then she will say 'Dunder head!' He'll get angry, and she will run away. That will make a splendid exit—she'll exit to a roar."

Kate raised and cast down her brown eyes softly, and her heart was filled with a mixed sense of admiration and wonder. It seemed to her extraordinary that a man should do so much, and for her.

Dick noted down the phrases on a piece of paper, to be pasted afterwards into the scrip. When this was done, he said:

"My dear, if you don't get a roar with these lines, you can call me a—— And when we play the piece at Hull, I shouldn't be surprised if you got noticed in the papers. But you must pluck up courage and cheek the Baillie."

Kate said nothing, but she felt unutterable things, and a vision of greatness assuaged the suspicion that too much was being asked of her.

"We must put up a rehearsal-call to-morrow for these lines. Now listen, Montgomery, and tell me how it reads."

CHAPTER XV.

REHEARSAL to-morrow at twelve for all those in the front scene of the *Cloches,*" cried the stage-door keeper to half-a-dozen girls as they pushed past him.

"Well I never, and I was going out to see the castle and the ramparts of the town," said one girl.

"I wonder what it's for," said another; "it went all right, I thought—didn't you? Did you hear any reason, Mr. Brown?"

"I 'ear there are to be new lines put in," replied the stage-door keeper, surlily, "but I don't know. Don't bother."

At the mention of the new lines the faces of the girls brightened, but instantly they strove to hide the hope and anxiety the announcement had caused them, and in the silence which ensued each tried to think how she could get a word with Mr. Lennox. At length one more enterprising than the rest said:

"I must run back. I've forgotten my handkerchief."

"You needn't mind your handkerchief, you won't see Mr. Lennox to-night," exclaimed Dolly, who always trampled on other people's illusions as readily as she did on her own.

The brutality of the answer caused a titter, but it soon subsided, everybody being anxious to hear the news, for Dolly's tone of voice intimated that she knew what was going to happen. Dispelling the angry look from the face of the girl she had attacked by putting her arm affectionately round her shoulder, Dolly continued:

"The lines are not for you, nor me, nor any of us. You little silly, can't you see who they are for? Why, for his girl, of course!"

Murmurs of assent followed this statement, and, her hands on her hips, Dolly triumphantly faced her auditors.

"I know it is damned hard lines, but there it is. You didn't expect the man to take her out of her linendrapery for nothing. You take my word for it, she'll get on now like a house on fire."

The old stage-door keeper, whose attention had been concentrated on what he was eating out of a jam-pot, now suddenly woke up to the fact that the passage was blocked, and that a group of musicians with boxes in their hands were waiting to get through.

"Now, ladies, I must ask you to move on, there are a lot of people behind you."

"Yes, get on, girls; we're all up a tree this time, and the moral of it is that we haven't yet learned how to fall in love with the managers. The paper-collar woman has beaten us at our own game."

A roar of laughter followed this remark, which was heard by everybody, and pushing the girls before her Dolly cleared the way.

Notwithstanding her distaste for, her determined opposition to the dirty stories told in the dressing-room, and her continued refusal to contribute an item of information to the eternal question of "Who was the nicest man you ever knew?" Kate's quiet and unmarked character had made her a general favorite. Except on the point above mentioned, she inclined easily to everybody's whims and foibles; she appeared ever ready to oblige, and she made no disagreeable remarks. At first, it is true, her pretty face caused some cruel bickerings, but the unassuming way in which she rather repudiated than accepted admiration softened the acidity of feminine jealousies, and the fact that she was not ill-looking finished by being gracefully accepted. She, moreover, was possessed of the soft, weak features that women invariably admire in their own sex. This was another recommendation in her favor, and as she never interfered with any of the men who came about the theatre, it had become the fashion, when the question was mooted, as to who could be called a really pretty woman, to cite Kate as an example. But she now found that she had jeopardized her popularity by accepting the small part of Jeanne. These girls, whose ambitions in life are limited,

first to obtaining a line—that is to say, permission to shout, in their red tights, when a low comedian appears on the stage, "Oh, what a jolly good fellow the Duke is!"—secondly, to being asked out to dinner by somebody they imagine looks like a gentleman, revolted against hearing this paper-collar woman, as they now called her, speak the long-dreamed-of, long-descried phrases; and at night all they dared do they did to "queer" her scene. They crowded round her, mugged, and tried to divert the attention of the house from her. She had to say, "Mr. Baillie, you've a fine head." *Baillie*, patting his crown—"Yes, a fine head." *Kate*—"A fat head." *Baillie*, indignantly—"A fat head!" *Kate*, hurriedly—"I mean a broad head." *Baillie*—"Yes, a broad head." *Kate*—"A thick head." *Baillie*, indignantly—"A thick head!" *Kate*—"No, no; a solid head," and so on *ad lib.* for ten minutes.

The scene went enormously. The pit screamed, and the gallery was in convulsions, and next day in the streets nothing was heard but ironical references to fat and thick heads. The girls had not succeeded in spoiling the scene, for, encouraged by the applause, Kate had chaffed and mocked at the Baillie so vigorously and wittily that she at once won the sympathy of the house. But the following night a tall, sour-faced girl, who wore pads, and with whom Kate had had some words concerning her coarse language, hit upon an ingenious device for interfering with her success. It consisted in bursting into a roar of laughter just before she had time to say, "A fat head." The others soon tumbled to the trick, and in a night or two they worked so well together that Kate grew so nervous that she could not speak her lines. This made her feel very miserable; and her stage experience being limited, she ascribed her non-success to her own fault, until one night Dick rushed, the moment the curtain was down at the end of the first act, into the middle of the stage. Putting up his arms with a large gesture, he called the company back.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "I have noticed that the front scene in this act has not been going as well as it used to. I don't want anyone to tell why this is so; the reason is sufficiently obvious, at least to me. I shall expect,

therefore, the ladies whom this matter concerns to attend a rehearsal to-morrow at twelve, and if after that I notice what I did to-night, I shall at once dismiss the delinquents from the company. I hope I make myself understood."

After this explanation, any further interference with Kate's scene was, of course, out of the question, and the verdict of each new town more and more firmly established its success. But if Dick's presence controlled the girls whilst they were on the stage, his authority diminished as it ascended to the dressing-rooms, and many were the expedients there resorted to to annoy Kate. Her particular enemy was Dolly Goddard. Not a night passed that this girl did not refer to the divorce cases she had read of in the papers, or pretended to have heard of. Her natural sharp wit enabled her to do this with considerable acidity. "Never heard such a thing my life, girls," she would begin. "They talk of us, but what we do is child's play compared with the doings of the respectable people. A baker's wife in this blessed town has just run away with the editor of a newspaper, leaving her six little children, one of them being a baby no more than a month old, behind her."

"What will the husband do?"

"Get a divorce." (Chorus—"He'll get a divorce, of course, of course, of course!")

To this delicate irony no answer was possible, and Kate could only bite her lips, and pretend not to understand. But it was difficult not to turn pale and tremble sometimes, so agonizing were the anecdotes that the active brain of Dolly conjured up concerning the atrocities that pursuing husbands had perpetrated with knife and pistol on the betrayers of their happiness. And when these scare-crows failed, there were always the dirty stories to fall back upon. A word sufficed to set the whole gang recounting experiences, and comparing notes. Often a sneer curled the corners of Kate's lips, but to protest she knew would be only to expose herself to a rude answer, and to appeal to Dick couldn't fail to excite still further enmity against her. Besides, what could he do? How could he define what were and what were not proper conversations for the dressing-rooms? Clearly, the best thing for her to do was to ask

him to put her to dress with the principals, and this she decided to do one evening when the words used in No. 6 had been more than usually warm.

Dick, of course, made no objection, and with Leslie and Beaumont Kate got on better.

"I am so glad you have come," said Leslie, as she bent to allow the dresser to place a wreath of orange-blossoms on her head. "I wonder you didn't think of asking Mr. Lennox to put you with us before."

"I didn't like to. I was afraid of being in your way," said Kate, as she examined with a circular look the blank whitewash, the overfilled slop-pail, and the naked gas-jet. "I hope Beaumont won't mind my being here."

"What matter if she does? Beaumont isn't half a bad sort once you begin to understand her. Just let her talk to you about her diamonds and her men, and it will be all right."

"But why haven't you been to see me lately? I want you to come out shopping with me one day next week. We shall be at York. I hear you can get some nice things there."

"Yes, there are some nice shops there. I would have been to see you before, but Frank has just got some new scores from London, and he wanted me to try them over with him. There's one that's just been produced in Paris—the loveliest music you ever heard in all your life. Come up to my place to-morrow and I'll play it over to you. But talking of music, I hear that you are getting on splendidly."

"I think I'm improving; Montgomery comes to practice with me every morning."

"He's all very well for the piano, but he can't teach you to produce your voice. What does he know? That brat of a boy! I'll tell you what I'll do," cried Leslie, suddenly confronting Kate; "we're going to York next week. Well, I'll introduce you to a first-rate man. He'd do more with you in six lessons than Montgomery in fifty. And the week after we shall be at Leeds. I can introduce you to another there."

"The curtain is just going up, Miss Leslie," cried the call-boy.

"All right," cried the prima donna, throwing the hare's foot to the dresser. "I must be off now. We'll talk of this to-morrow."

Immediately after the stately figure of Beaumont entered. Putting her black bag down with a thump on the table she exclaimed:

"Good heavens! not dressed yet! My God! you'll be late."

"Late for what?" asked Kate in astonishment.

"Didn't Mr. Lennox tell you that you had to sing my song, the market woman's song, in the first act?"

"No, I heard nothing of it."

"Then for goodness sake make haste. Here, stick your face out. I'll do your make-up while the dresser laces you. But you'll be able to manage the song, won't you? It is quite impossible for me to get dressed in time. I can't understand Mr. Lennox not having told you."

"Oh, yes, I shall be able to get through it—at least I hope so," Kate answered, trembling with the sudden excitement of the news. "I think I know all the words except the encore verse."

"Oh, you won't need that," said Beaumont, betrayed by a twinge of professional jealousy. "Now turn the other cheek. By Jove, we've no time to lose; they are just finishing the wedding chorus. If you're late it won't be my fault. I sent down word to the theatre to ask if you would sing my song in the first act, as I had some friends coming down from London to see me. You know the Marquis of Worthing—has been a friend of mine for years. That'll do for the left eye."

"If you put out your leg a little farther I'll pull on your stocking, and then you'll be all right," said the dresser.

This was done in a jiffy, and just staying a moment to pull up her garters in a sort of nervous trance, she rushed on to the stage, followed into the wings by Beaumont, who had come to hear how the song would go.

It was a complete success, and from an enthusiastic pit she got a double encore.

These little triumphs encouraged Kate more than ever to take Miss Leslie's advice; and in no town they visited

where the advantages of musical instruction could be obtained did she neglect to avail herself of the chance. Montgomery was at first inclined to jealously resent the interference of other masters, but all the objections he had to offer were steadily overruled by Dick. And he, more than any one, urged her to continue her studies. In matters of money he remained as heedlessly generous as ever. "Your lessons cost you three pounds, dear? Very well, here's five quid," he would say, pulling a lot of loose sovereigns out of his waistcoat pocket.

"But what am I to do with the rest?"

"You are sure to want it. Buy yourself some gloves, or a new hat."

She felt that she would never be able to repay him for his kindness. She experienced the most delicious intervals of love, and her heart was over-filled with sensations of gratitude. Indeed, unless the familiarity, the spoony ways of which he seemed unable to divest himself in speaking to a woman, be pleaded against him, his conduct towards her was irreproachable. But the considerateness he showed on all other points rendered this frailty the more noticeable, and in all Kate's examinations of conscience pushed it into irritating prominence. Yet it was only natural that doubt should grow upon her. The constant presence, the very odor of skirts in which they lived, was revolting to think of, and daily to desire to possess him beyond the power, the assailing temptation of any woman, became an increasing want in her mind.

The continual nerve-excitement in which she lived, the rich diet, the brandies and sodas supped in the dressing-rooms, the constant gratification of bodily pleasure, combined to produce in her naturally placid nature violent revolts and demands for passionate outbursts. Often at her music lesson she would grind her little teeth; a sudden thought would strike her that he had taken advantage of her absence to go round and see one of the girls. Then, again, under her very eyes, before the curtain had gone up, when the girls were assembled on the stage, he would put his arm round the shoulders of some girl who had come to ask him a question. These were moments in which a

little childish rage boiled like a kettle within her, and she would clench her hands, and a mad instinct of scratching awoke in the muscles of her arms. Bitterly, too, at night, when they got home after the theatre, she used to reproach him; and what annoyed her even more than the fact itself, was the absolute unconsciousness he always displayed of having ever done anything wrong. At last, exasperated by the eternal "My dear, I don't remember," she seized him by the fuzzy hair, and pulled until the tears came into his eyes. It was, however, half in fun, and Kate burst out laughing soon after; but Dick, unobservant as he was, could not help looking at her in astonishment. The change that had come over her since she left Hanley was apparent. Physically, the change was for the better. Her cheeks were fuller, the lines of her face softer; her eyes had become less monotonous in color, and more provoking in expression: and she smiled more readily. Psychologically, the change was even more marked. The broad, simple lines on which her views of life and things had formerly been based, had become twisted, broken, and confused; her tastes were now more complex and her desires more febrile. Even her principles of honesty had become shaken. Anecdotes of clever swindles no longer wounded her feelings; she now listened to and laughed at them with the rest. The middle-class woman, in a word, had disappeared, and the Bohemian taken her place; and had it not been for the anger with which she repulsed all levity of conversation, and the cold way she frowned upon the spicy little stories, the delight of theatrical supper-tables, the closest scrutiny might have failed to find a clue wherewith to trace her back to her origin. But regarding the moral question, she seemed daily to grow more severe, and many were the disputes Kate and Dick had on the subject. For the smallest thing said in her presence she would challenge him with not respecting her. And it was amusing to watch the poor good-natured creature, who neither respected nor disrespected any living thing, but lived only for the enjoyment of the moment, striving to lead the conversation away from dangerous ground. Beaumont and Mortimer often made this ex-

tremely difficult for him, and when they met at dinner or supper Dick's attempts at steering a clear way through the sticky suggestiveness of their allusions recalled often the struggles of a bluebottle threading his way out of a spider's web. For, besides maintaining a tight rein over his own tongue, he was likewise made responsible for the conduct of others, and expected, on the first suspicion of impropriety, to call the offender to account. This was as may be easily imagined, not too facile a task, and often placed Dick in a somewhat ludicrous position. But Kate forced obedience upon him. Out of her former placid nature had arisen a perky little spirit, which, although it sometimes worried, was not without charm for her soft-hearted lover. Little as he cared for the opinions of others, he could not help feeling proud of her, and the novelty of seeing her assert herself pleased him. Was he not enjoying the society of a second woman whose existence till now he had not suspected? This dose of authoritative self-reliance had been introduced into her character; first, by the fact that she was now a divorced woman; secondly, by the fact that she was now earning two pounds a week, and received nightly a round of public applause. The news of the decree *nisi* had, of course, suggested many thoughts for the future, and had frightened her considerably. But in the reflections and analysis of her life which these fears forced upon her, it became gradually clear to her that she was not such a very unimportant person after all. She was getting on with her music; she could play most things, and sing a little at sight, and everybody said that, when she got a part, that she would make a success of it. Besides, she was admired more than any one in the company. At this point, however, Kate's thoughts came always to a sudden stop. What was vaguely floating in her mind was that she had only to make a choice to get any man she liked; but the morality of years intervening, she shrank from defining her thoughts. A wave of suppressed pride would sweep up through her soul, and with a flush in her cheeks she remembered that she was, after all, the honestest woman in the theatre. She admitted that she had deserted her husband for another man. It was

very wicked, that she knew; but she could not help herself. They should have been kinder to her than they had been at home. Her husband had never really loved her, and her mother-in-law——. But she could not bring herself,even in thought, to abuse Mrs. Ede, and in preference it pleased her to think how great was her love for Dick. If she was living with a man to whom she was not married, it was because she cared for him. Kate clung resolutely to this last fleeting remnant of her past life, and for this reason she passionately—even at the risk of making herself unpopular—could not refrain from asserting her claims to the title of an honest woman; and this, and an overmastering desire to succeed in her profession, were the two things that now occupied her mind. In speculations as to when she would obtain a part, her jealousy was forgotten, and for the time being her lover was spared many bitter recriminations. Nevertheless, she grumbled very much at having nothing to do. When her little scene with the Baillie was over, she had to walk aimlessly about with the rest of the chorus. In *Madame Angot* she hadn't a line; after her success with the fishwife's song, Beaumont took good care not to give her another chance. Every night this matter was discussed, but Dick could not, as he said, sack the principals. All sorts of expedients were suggested, even to the possibility of mounting a new opera—a proposition much approved of by Montgomery; but nothing could be agreed on save the advisability of Kate setting to work to understudy Miss Leslie.

"Kate could play Serpolette as it was never played before," exclaimed Dick, who believed implicitly in her talent.

"And I'll engage that she does," cried Montgomery; "I'll bring up the score to-morrow and we'll have a go at it."

Once begun, the studies proceeded gayly. Apparently deeply interested, in the somnolent beatitude of the morning hours, Dick lay back, smoking perpetual cigarettes in the armchair. Montgomery hammered with nervous vigor at the piano; Kate stood by his side, her soul burning in the ardors of her task. She would have preferred

the part of Germaine; it would have better suited her mild demeanor than the frisky Serpolette; but in vain it seemed to hope for illness or any accident that would prevent Beaumont from playing. They could only suggest that Leslie was often imprudent, and praying for a bronchial visitation they watched at night to see how she was wrapped up.

When Kate knew the music a rehearsal was called for her to go through the business, and it was then that the long-smouldering indignation broke out against her. In the first place the girl who till now had been entrusted with the understudy, and had likewise lived in the hopes of coughs and colds, burst into floods of passionate tears and storms of violent words. She attacked Kate vigorously; and the scene was doubly unpleasant, as it took place in the presence of everybody. The most remorseless references were made to dying and deserted husbands, and all the acridness of the chorus-girl was squeezed into allusions anent the Divorce Court. This was as disagreeable for Dick as for Kate. The rehearsal had to be dismissed, and the lady in question was sent back to London. Sympathy at first ran very strongly on the side of the weak, and the ladies of the theatre were united in their efforts to make it as disagreeable as possible for Kate. She bore up, however, courageously; and after a time her continual refusal to again rehearse the part won a reaction in her favor; and when Miss Leslie's cold began to grow worse, and it became clear that some one must understudy Serpolette, the part fell without opposition to her share.

And now every minute of the day was given to learning or thinking out in her inner consciousness some portion of her part. In the middle of her breakfast she would hurriedly lay her cup with a clink in the saucer and say, "Look here, Dick; tell me how I am to do that run in—my first entrance, you know."

"What are your words, dear?"

"'Who speaks ill of Serpolette?'"

The breakfast-table would then be pushed out of the way and the entrance rehearsed. Dick seemed never to get tired, and the run was practised over and over again.

Coming home from the theatre at night, it was always a question of this effect and that effect; of whether Leslie might not have scored a point if she had accentuated the lifting of her skirt in the famous song.

That was, as Dick declared, the "number of grip;" and often, at two o'clock in the morning, just as she was getting into bed, Kate would, in her chemise, begin to sing—

> "Look at me here! look at me there!
> Criticise me everywhere!
> From head to feet I am most sweet,
> And most perfect and complete."

But, above all, there was a scene in the first act in which Serpolette had to run screaming with laughter away from her cross old uncle, Gaspard, and dodge him, hiding behind the Baillie and his clerk. To do this effectively required a certain *chic*, a gayety, which Kate did not seem able to summon up; and therein lay the weak place in her rendering of the part. "You're all right for a minute, and then you sober down into a Germaine," Dick would say, at the end of a long and critical conversation. And for days this judgment formed the theme of Kate's ruminations. Thinking it cannot be called, but in the efforts of her intelligence to generate in herself and give birth to the being indicated by the dramatist, she mentally transported herself to scenes of artificial pleasure—scenes in which she was surrounded by lovers who, drinking wine from goblets of gold, crowned her with roses and maddened her with laughter. Thus she divined a wild gayety, as in the murmuring of a sea-shell we hear the wash of the sea; and far away saw, as we see reflections in deep waters, flying figures and floating hair, in the middle of which kisses were snatched.

The business she learned to "parrot"; Dick taught her the gestures and the intonations of voice to be used, and after she had had a glass of wine, he said he would back her to go through the part quite as well as Leslie.

Leslie! The word was now constantly in their minds. Would her cold get worse or better? was the question discussed the most frequently between Dick, Kate, and Mont-

gomery. Sometimes it was better, sometimes worse; but at last at the moment of their greatest despondency the welcome news came that she had slipped downstairs and sprained her foot badly.

"Oh, the poor thing!" said Kate; "I'm so sorry. Had I known that was——"

"Was going to happen you wouldn't have learnt the part," exclaimed Montgomery, with his loud, vacant laugh.

Answering him with an angry glance, she cast down her eyes, and beat her foot impatiently on the ground. After a long silence she said, "I shall go and see her."

"You'd much better run through your music with Montgomery, and mind not to forget to see the dresser about your dress. And, for God's sake, do try and put a bit of gayety into the part. Serpolette is a bit of a romp, you know."

"Try to put a bit of gayety into the part," rang in Kate's ears unceasingly. It haunted her as she took in the waist of Leslie's dress, while she leaned over Montgomery's shoulder at the piano or listened to his conversation. He was enthusiastic, and she thought it very pretty of him to say, "I am glad to have had a share in your first success. No one forgets that; that's sure to be remembered."

It was the nearest thing to a profession of love he had ever made, but she was preoccupied with other thoughts, and had to send him away for a last time to study the dialogue before the glass.

"Try to put a little gayety into the part. Serpolette is a romp, you know."

"Yes, a romp; but what is a romp?" Kate asked herself; and she strove to realize in detail that which she had accepted till now in outline. The first thing to be done was to get rid of her gloom; and feeling angry like one who has started at a shadow, she went over to the cupboard, took out a decanter, and drank a couple of glasses of sherry. The stimulant had the desired effect. Gayly she skipped now from the graver scenes of her married life which had irritated her to reminiscences of factory boys and girls larking together; to recollections of village fêtes; to all things that would help her to attune her thoughts

to the sentiments of the three hours to be passed in the day of the footlights and the shadow of painted trees. The struggle was a hard one, but it was on this evening, more than any other, that she freed herself from the weight of ten years of work which pressed upon her, and trod the heaviest tread on the head of her anterior life.

CHAPTER XVI

"LADIES and gentleman," said Mr. Hayes, who had much against his will been pushed before the curtain of the Theatre Royal, Bristol, to make the following statement, "I am sorry to inform you that in consequence of indisposition—that is to say, the accidental spraining of her ankle—Miss Leslie will not be able to appear to-night. Your kind indulgence is therefore requested for Miss D'Arcy, who has, on the shortest notice, consented to play the part of Serpolette."

"Did yer ever 'ear of any one spraining an ankle on purpose?" asked a scene-shifter.

"Husb!" said the gasman, "he'll 'ear you."

Amid murmurs of applause, Mr. Hayes backed into the wings.

"Well, was it all right?" he asked Dick.

"Right, my boy, I should think it was; there was a touch of Gladstone in your accidental sprained ankle."

"What do you mean?" said the discomfited acting manager.

"I haven't time to tell you now. Now then, girls, are you ready?" he said, rushing on to the stage and hurriedly changing the places of the choristers. Putting his hand on a girl's shoulder, he moved her to the right or left as his taste dictated. Then retiring abruptly, he cried, "Now then, up you go!" and immediately after thirty voices in one sonority sang,

> "In Corneville's wide market-pla—a—ces
> Sweet servant girls with rosy fa—a—ces
> Wait here, wait here."

"Now, then, come on. You make you entrance from the top left."

"I don't think I shall ever be able to do that run in."

"Don't begin to think about anything. If you don't

like the run, I'll tell you how to do it," said Dick, his face lighting up with a sudden inspiration; "do it with a cheeky swagger, walking very slowly, like this; and then when you get quarter of the way down the stage, stop for a moment and sing, 'Who speaks ill of Serpolette?' Do you see!"

"Yes, yes, that will suit me better; I understand."

Then standing under the sloping wing, they both listened anxiously for the cue.

"She loves Grenicheux."

"There's your cue. On you go, give me your shawl."

The footlights dazzled her. The shadow-filled auditorium spotted with hundreds of faces, was appalling; a burst of applause rather frightened than reassured her, and a prey to a sort of dull dream, she sang her first lines. But she was a little behind the beat. Montgomery brought down his stick furiously, the *répliques* of the girls buffeted her ears like palms of hands, and it was not until she was half-way through the gossiping couplets, and saw Montgomery's arm swing peacefully to and fro over the bent profiles of the musicians that she fairly recovered her presence of mind. Then came the little scene in which she runs away from her uncle Gaspard and hides behind the Baillie. And she dodged the old man with such sprightliness from one side of the stage to the other that a murmur of admiration floated over the pit, and, arising in circular echoes, was prolonged almost until she stepped down to the footlights to sing the legend of Serpolette.

The quaintly tripping cadences of the tune and the humor of the words, which demanded to be rather said than sung, were rendered to perfection. It was impossible not to like her when she said,

> "I know not much of my relations,
> I never saw my mother's face;
> And of preceding generations
> I never found a single trace.
>
> "I may have fallen from the sky,
> Or blossomed in a rosebud sweet;
> But all I know is this, that I
> Was found by Gaspard in his wheat."

A smile of delight filled the theatre, and Kate felt the chilling sense of separation which exists between the public and a débutante being gradually filled in by a delicious but almost incomprehensible notion of contact—a sensation more delicate than the touch of a lover's breath on your face. This reached a climax when she sang the third verse, and had not etiquette forbade, she would have had an encore for it alone.

> "I often think that perhaps I may
> The heiress to a kingdom be,
> But as I wore no clothes that day
> I brought no papers out with me."

These words, that had often seemed coarse in Leslie's mouth, in Kate's seemed adorably simple. So winning was the smile and so coquettishly conscious did she seem of the compromising nature of the statement she was making, that the entire theatre was actuated by the impulse of one thought—Oh! what a little dear you must have been lying in the wheat-field! The personality of the actress disappeared in the rosy thighs and chubby arms of the foundling, and notwithstanding the length of the song, she had to sing it twice over. Then there was an exit for her, and she rushed into the wings. Several of the girls spoke to her, but it was impossible for her to reply to them. Everything swam in and out of sight like shapes in a mist, and she could only distinguish the burly form of her lover. He wrapped a shawl about her, and a murmur of amiable words followed her, and, with her thoughts fizzing like champagne, she tried to listen to his praises.

Then followed moments in which she anxiously waited for her cues. She was nervously afraid of missing her entrance, and she dreaded spoiling her success by some mistake. But it was not until the end of the act when she stepped out of the crowd of servant-girls to sing the famous coquetting song, that she reached the summit of her triumph.

Kate was about the medium height, a shade over five feet five. When she swung her little dress as she strutted on the stage she reminded you immediately of a pigeon.

In her apparent thinness from time to time was revealed a surprising plumpness. For instance, her bosom, no more in a walking dress than an indication, in a low body assumed the roundness of a bird's, and the white lines of her falling shoulders floated in long undulations into the blue masses of her hair. The nervous sensibility of her profession had awakened her face, and now the brown eyes laughed with the spiritual maliciousness with which we willingly endow the features of a good fairy. The hips were womanly, the ankle was only a touch of stocking, and, when coquettishly lifting the skirt, she sang,

> "Look at me here, look at me there,
> Criticise me everywhere.
> I am most sweet from head to feet,
> And most perfect and complete."

the whole house rose to a man and roared. The audience, principally composed of sailors—men home from months of watery weariness, nights of toil and darkness, maddened by the irritating charm of the music and the delicious modernity of Kate's figure and dress, looked as if they were going to precipitate themselves from the galleries. Was she not the living reality of the figures posted over the hammocks in oil-smelling cabins, the prototype of the short-skirted damsels that decorated the empty match boxes which they preserved and gazed at under the light of the stars?

Her success was enormous, and she was forced to sing,

> "Look at me here,"

five times before her friends would allow the piece to proceed. At the end of the act she received an ovation. Two reporters of the local newspapers obtained permission to come behind to see her. London engagements were spoken of, and in the general enthusiasm some one talked about grand opera. Even her fellow artists forgot their jealousies, and in the nervous excitement of the moment complimented her highly. Beaumont, anxious to kick down her rival, declared, "That, to say the least of it, it

was a better rendering of the part than Leslie's." On hearing this, Bret, whose forte was not repartee, moved away; Mortimer, in his least artificial manner, said that it was not bad for a beginning and that she'd get on if she worked at it. Dubois strutted and spoke learnedly of how the part had been played in France, and he was pleased to trace by an analysis which was difficult to follow a resemblance between Kate and Madame Judic.

The second act went equally well. And after seeing the ghosts she got a bouquet thrown to her, so cheekily did she sing the refrain,

"For a regiment of soldiers wouldn't make me afraid."

She had therefore now only to maintain her prestige to the end, and when she had got her encore for the cider song, and had been recalled before the curtain at the end of the third act, with unstrung nerves she wandered to her dressing-room, thinking of what Dick would say when they got home. But the pleasures of the evening were not over yet: there was the supper, when her success would be thoroughly discussed, still to be looked forward to. She would have liked to have been alone with Dick; but on consideration, thinking it would look awkward not to ask Montgomery, she whispered to him in the wings, when she came down from the dressing-room, that they hoped to see him at their place later on. He said he would be very glad, but for the moment he was obliged to cut away as he had some music to copy out.

Kate was left alone in the vacant twilight of the stage. The scene-shifters were carrying to and fro the long swinging wings, the T-light was flaring. As she walked up and down the rough boards a warm joy, a luxurious consciousness of success, penetrated her whole being, and her thoughts balanced themselves voluptuously on the remembrance. She recalled each round of applause she had received; she dwelt upon and tickled herself amorously with the souvenir of the compliments that had been paid to her. Indistinct visions of future successes amassed themselves in her mind, and in feelings that were profoundly sensual

she savored in advance the pleasure that would presently be hers when, sitting between Dick and Montgomery, she would hear them talking of her, and discussing in detail the events of which she had been the heroine. From time to time chorus-girls passed across going in the direction of the stage-door. As they went by her they invariably stopped and, with a few mechanical words and a hard smile, strove to compliment her. Kate thanked them and continued her walk. At last Beaumont and Dolly Goddard came by. After a phrase or two concerning the piece, questions were asked about Dick. Kate answered that she was waiting for him. At that moment a scene-shifter who happened to be passing, supplied the information that he had seen Mr. Lennox leaving the theatre some twenty minutes ago, and that he had not returned. Kate wondered where he had gone to, and while she puzzled her brains to think why he had not left a message for her, she listened to Beaumont who was proposing that they should go round, before it was too late, and have a drink at the pub. Afraid he might return in her absence, and knowing how he disapproved of her going to public-houses with the girls, she hesitated; but Beaumont insisted, and as it was a question of drinking to that night's success, Kate, fearing to appear ungenerous, consented. A word was left with the stage-door keeper.

"No, not here," said Beaumont, shoving an inch or so apart the swinging doors. Dolly and Kate were behind her. "'Tis too full. I'll show you the way round by the side entrance."

And giggling, the girls slipped into the private apartment.

"What will you have, dear?" asked Beaumont in an apologetic whisper.

"I think I'll have a whisky."

"You'll have the same, Dolly?"

"Scotch or Irish?" asked the barman.

The girls consulted a moment, and decided in favor of Irish.

With nods and glances the health of Serpolette was drunk, and then fearing to look as if she were sponging,

Kate insisted on likewise standing treat. Fortunately when the second round had been drunk closing time was announced by the man in the shirt-sleeves, and bidding her friends good-by, Kate stood in the street trying to think if she ought to return to the theatre to look after Dick or go home and find him there.

Deciding on the latter alternative, she walked slowly along the street. A chill wind blew up from the sea, and the sudden transition from the hot atmosphere of the bar brought the fumes of the whisky to her head and she felt a little giddy. An idea of drunkenness suggested itself; it annoyed her, and repulsing it vehemently, her thoughts somewhat savagely fastened on to Dick as the culprit. "Where had he gone to?" she asked, at first curiously, but at each repetition she put the question more sullenly to herself. If he had come back to fetch her she would not have been led into the public-house with Beaumont; and, irritated that any shadow should have fallen on the happiness of the evening, she walked sturdily along until a sudden turn brought her face to face with her lover.

"Oh!" he said, starting, "is that you, Kate? I was just cutting back to the theatre to fetch you."

"Yes, a nice time you've kept me waiting," she answered; but as she spoke she recognized the street they were in as the one in which Leslie lived. The blood rushed to her face, and tearing the while the paper fringe of her bouquet, she said, "I know very well where you have been to! I want no telling. You have been round spending your time with Leslie."

"Well," said Dick, embarrassed by the directness with which she divined his errand, "I don't see what harm there was in that. I really thought that I ought to run and see how she was."

Struck by the reasonableness of this answer, Kate for the moment remained silent, but a sudden remembrance forced the anger that was latent in her to her head, and facing him again she said:

"How dare you tell me such a lie. You know very well you went to see her because you like her, because you love her."

Dick looked at her surprised.

"I assure you, you are mistaken," he said. But at that moment Bret passed them in the street, hurrying towards Leslie's. The meeting was an unfortunate one, and it sent a deeper pang of jealousy to Kate's heart.

"There," she said, "haven't I proof of your baseness? What do you say to that?"

"To what?"

"Don't pretend innocence. Didn't you see Bret passing? You choose your time nicely to pay visits—just when he should be out."

"Oh!" said Dick, surprised at the ingenuity of the deduction. "I give you my word that such an idea never occurred to me."

But before he could get any further with his explanation Kate again cut him short, and in passionate words told him he was a monster and a villain. So taken aback was he by this sudden manifestation of temper on the part of one in whom he did not suspect its existence, that he stopped, to assure himself that she was not joking. A glance sufficed to convince him; and making frequent little halts between the lamp-posts to argue the different points more definitely, quarrelling they proceeded home. But on arriving at the door, Kate experienced a moment of revolt that surprised herself. The palms of her hands itched, and consumed with a childish desire to scratch and beat this big man, she beat her little feet against the pavement. Dick fumbled at the lock. The delay still further irritated her, and it seemed impossible that she could enter the house that night.

"Aren't you coming in?" he said at last.

"No, not I. You go back to Miss Leslie; I'm sure she wants you to attend to her ankle."

This was too absurd, and Dick gently expostulated. But nothing he could say was of the slightest avail, and she refused to move from the doorstep. Then began a long argument; and in brief phrases, amid frequent interruptions, all sorts of things were discussed. The wind blew very cold; Kate did not seem to notice it, but Dick shivered in his fat. Noticing his trembling she taunted

him with it, and insultingly advised him to go to bed. Not knowing what answer to give to this, he walked into the sitting-room and sat down by the fire. How long would she remain on the doorstep? he asked himself humbly, until his reflections were interrupted by the sound of steps. It was Montgomery, and chuckling, Dick listened to him reasoning with Kate. The cold was so intense that the discussion could not be continued for long; and when the two friends entered Dick was prepared for a reconciliation. But in this he was disappointed. She merely consented to sit in the arm-chair, and from time to time she glared at her lover. Montgomery tried to argue with her, but he could scarcely succeed in getting her to answer him. It was not until he commenced to question Dick on the reason of the quarrel that she consented to speak; and then her utterances were more passionate denials of her lover's statements than any distinct explanation. There were also long silences, during which she sat savagely picking at the paper of the bouquet, which she still retained. At last Montgomery noticing the supper that no one cared to touch said:

"Well, all I know is, that it is very unfortunate that you should have chosen this night of all others, the night of her success, to have a row. I expected a pleasant evening."

"Success, indeed!" said Kate, starting to her feet. "Was it for such a success as this that he took me away from my home? Oh, what a fool I was! Success! A lot I care for the success, when he has been spending the evening with Leslie." And unable to contain herself any longer, she tore a handful of flowers out of her bouquet and threw them in Dick's face. Handful succeeded handful, each being accompanied by a shower of vehement words. The two men waited in wonderment, and when passionate reproaches and spring flowers were alike exhausted, a flood of tears and a rush into the next room ended the scene.

CHAPTER XVII

KATE'S anger lasted until the following day, until it was announced that Miss Leslie suffered so much with her ankle, that she would be unable to travel. Then the whole company called to see the poor invalid; the chorus left their names, the principals went up to sit by the sofa-side. They all brought her something: Beaumont, a basket of fruit; Dolly Goddard, a bouquet of roses; Dubois, an interesting novel; Mortimer, a fresh stock of anecdotes. The subject of sprains was eagerly discussed. Dubois had known a première danseuse at the Opera House in Paris, who, etc. Beaumont tried to tell the story of a certain piece of orange-peel, but she soon lost the thread of her story, and gave them instead a good deal of information concerning her intimacy with Lord Worthing. But Bret was the person of the hour; it was he who undid the bandages, and changed Miss Leslie's position when she asked to be moved. It would, of course, be impossible to produce either opera without him; and when he and Dick went out of the room a look of inquiry was passed round.

"You needn't be uneasy. I wouldn't let Bret stop for anything. I shall be very very comfortable here. My landlady is as kind as she can be, and the rooms are very nice."

A murmur of approval followed these words, and continuing Miss Leslie said, laying her hand on Kate's,

"And my friend here will play my parts until I come back. You must begin to-night, my dear, and try to work up Clairette. If you are a quick study you may be able to play it on Wednesday night."

This was too much; the tears stood in Kate's eyes. She had in her pocket a little gold porte-bonheur which she had bought that morning to make a present of to her once-hated rival, but she waited until they were alone to slip

it on the good-natured prima donna's wrist. The parting between the two women was very touching and being in the melting mood Kate made a full confession of her quarrel with Dick, and, abandoning herself, she sought for consolation. Leslie smiled curiously, and after a long pause said,

"I know what you mean, dear, I have been jealous myself; but you'll get over it, and learn to take things easily as I do. Men aren't worth it." The last phrase seemed to have slipped from her inadvertently, and seeing how she had shocked Kate she hastened to add, "Dick is a very good fellow, and will look after you; but take my advice, don't kick up a row; we women don't gain anything by it."

The words dwelt long in Kate's mind, but she found it hard to act up to the counsel given. Her temper surprised even herself. It seemed to be giving way, and she trembled with rage at things that before would not have stirred an unquiet thought in her mind. Remembrances of the passions which used to convulse her when a child returned to her. As is generally the case, there was right on both sides. Her life, it must be confessed, was woven about with temptations. Dick's character easily engendered suspicion, and when the study of the part of Clairette was over, the iron of distrust began again to force its way into her heart. The slightest thing sufficed to arouse her. On one occasion, when travelling from Bath to Wolverhampton, she could not help thinking, judging from the expression of the girl's face, that Dick was squeezing Dolly's foot under the rug; without a word she moved to the other end of the carriage and remained looking out of the window for the rest of the journey. Another time she was seized with a fit of mad rage at seeing Dick dancing with Beaumont at the end of the second act of *Madame Angot*. There were floods of tears and a distinct refusal "to dress with that woman." Dick was in despair! What could he do? There was no spare room, and unless she went to dress with the chorus he didn't know what she'd do.

"My God!" he exclaimed to Mortimer, as he rushed across the stage after the "damned property-man," "never

have your woman playing in the same theatre as yourself; it is awful!"

The situation could not have been better summed up. For the last couple of weeks Kate had been pestering him to death. Everything he did seemed to be wrong. Success, instead of satisfying her, seemed to render her more irriable, and instead of contenting herself with the plaudits that were nightly showered upon her, her constant occupation was to find out either where Dick was or what he had been doing or saying. If he went up to make a change without telling her she would invent some excuse for sending to inquire after him; if he were giving some directions to the girls at one of the top entrances, she would walk from the wing where she was waiting for her cue to ask him what he was saying. This watchfulness caused a great deal of merriment in the theatre, and in the dressing-rooms Mortimer's imitation of the catechism the manager was put to at night was considered very amusing.

"My dear, I assure you you are mistaken in your calculation. I only smoked two cigarettes after lunch, and then I had a glass of beer. I swear I am concealing nothing from you."

This is scarcely a parody of the strict surveillance under which Dick lived, but from a mixture of lassitude and goodnature it did not seem to annoy him too much, and he appeared to be most troubled when Kate murmured that she was tired, that she hated the profession and would like to go and live in the country. For now she complained of fatigue and weariness; the society of those who formed her life no longer interested her, and she took violent and unreasoning antipathies. It was not infrequent for Mortimer and Montgomery to make an arrangement to grub with the Lennoxes whenever a landlady could be discovered who would undertake so much cooking. But now, suddenly, without being able to explain why, Kate declared she could not abide sitting face to face with the heavy lead, and listening any longer to his drawled-out stories. She saw and heard quite enough of him at the theatre without being bothered by him in the daytime. Dick made no objection. Indeed, he confessed willingly that he was a bit

tired of disconnected remarks, whose wit lay in their irrelevancy; and Mortimer always got sulky if you didn't laugh at his jokes. Montgomery still continued to board with them, and although he and Kate did not always manage to hit it off, they on the whole got on very well together. Love helped him to bear with a good deal of pettishness, and Dick regarded him as a sort of breakwater, over and against which a great deal of unpleasantness rippled harmlessly away. Dubois, who was asked to take Mortimer's place for a time, got on better with her. For after the drawled-out dirt of Mortimer's dress and speech, the natty appearance of the little foreigner was a welcome change, and the importance with which he handed round pieces of information concerning all things, from Gladstone to Offenbach, was very funny. He was the type of the man who can do everything better than anybody else. It did not matter whether you spoke of Balzac's position in modern fiction or the rolling of cigarettes, you were sure to be interrupted with, "I assure you, my dear fellow, you are mistaken," uttered in a stentorian voice. But it was his naïveté that was most astonishing. On the subject of his bass voice a child could draw him out, and, under the pretext of instituting a comparison between him and one of the bass choristers, Montgomery never failed to induce him to give the company an idea of his register. At first to see the little man settling the double chin into his chest in his efforts to get at the low D used to convulse Kate with laughter, but after a time even this grew monotonous, and wearily she begged of Montgomery to leave him alone. "Nothing seems to amuse you now," he would say with a mingled look of affection and regret. A shrug of the shoulder she considered a sufficient answer for him, and she would sink back as if pursuing to its furthest consequences the train of some far-reaching idea.

And, wondering, these men watched the progress of Kate's malady without ever suspecting what was really the matter with her. She was homesick.

After excesses of all kinds comes a more or less violent reaction. Her doses of pleasure she had steadily increased,

until in her successful appearance as Serpolette in *Les Cloches de Corneville* she had reached the maximum attainable quantity. Her love of Dick remained to her, and if she quarrelled with him it was because she dreaded losing him more vividly than before. But her love could not, now that a pause had come in her life, keep back the terrible weight of early influences. Kate had not become an actress, she was merely a middle-class woman veneered with Bohemianism, and again the peace and calm on which she had been nourished began to appear through the varnish, and when she thought that there was nothing before her but this ever-rolling hurry from town to town, from lodging-house to lodging-house, she grew appalled at the future that awaited her. It seemed to her like some horrible punishment, and she often awoke screaming from nightmares in which she was bound to a wheel that rolled on forever. But besides this she had lately began to suspect that she was enceinte. The doubt terrified her, and there were times when her cravings for a little rest amounted to delirium. Now she rarely missed saying on Saturday nights when the labour of packing had to be begun:—

"Oh, Dick! how tired I am! What would I give for a little holiday, just to be quiet for a bit, and do nothing—nothing, except go out to walk with you and sit on a seashore, as we used to in Blackpool!"

Week by week the idea of the inevitable railway-station grew upon her, until it became as nauseous to her as the expected dose of medicine is to a child. And the very fact that the travelling had to be done on a Sunday added to its repulsiveness; for when they drove through a closed town the remembrance of the church hour of old time would overwhelm her with insuperable sweetness, and the temptations to revive the Hanley Sundays brought burning tears to her eye-lids. One day as they were preparing to start, the vision of the long railway journey, with all its certain horrors of card-playing, smoking, and lewd anecdotes, arose in her mind side by side with the memory of the clear lofty windows, the severe pews, the pure elevation of the soul, the simple hymns, their soft assuagements, and all the benedictive felicities of the Sabbath.

The shock was too sudden and admitted of no resistance, and she exclaimed passionately,

"No, I cannot! I will not go to-day on that horrible journey! I cannot, Dick; do not ask me."

Dick looked up, surprised beyond measure.

"What do you mean?" he said after a pause. "You won't come to Bath? Well, and I should like to know who's to play Clairette to-morrow night?"

"Why, I am, of course."

"I don't understand. You don't mean to say that you want us to do another week at Leamington when we are dated for Bath?"

"Of course not! I can follow on to-night by a later train."

"And what good will that do you, dear?" said Dick, feeling much relieved by the explanation.

"Well, I'd like to have one Sunday in quiet; I'd like to go to church, that's all. I daresay you think it nonsense, but I don't."

For a moment Dick looked at Kate in silent and lazy astonishment. The examination irritated her. Her face twitched, and her fingers fidgeted with the plaits of her dress. At last he said,

"Well, I never! You seem to get more and more capricious every day."

"Then you won't let me?" said Kate, with a flush flowing through her olive cheeks.

"Won't let you? Why shouldn't you stay if it pleases you, dear? It does no harm to anybody. Besides, Montgomery is staying too; he wants to see an aunt of his who lives in the town."

Dick's unaffected kindness so touched Kate's sensibilities that the tears welled up into her eyes, and, hysterically sobbing, she flung herself into his arms. For the moment she was very happy, and she looked into the dream of the long day she was going to spend with Montgomery. She had now learned to joy in this Platonic friendship, almost to the detriment of her love of the other man. Her affection for Dick was not waning, but with him from the first there had been no illusions; she had been overcome and

was held by the mere fleshly force of humanity; and it was out of this hotbed of sensualism that floated the pale perfumes of the secret affinities that united her in spirit with the sentimental soul of the musician. Now it seemed to her that he was a necessary part of her existence, and she almost congratulated herself that Dick was not going to be with them at Leamington. There is always a side of a woman's character that no one man can understand.

The day was not less charming than the dream, and trembling with nervous delight, they hurried through the town, inquiring for the Wesleyan church. At last it was found. On entering she hesitated, overcome by a rush of memories. But this was only momentarily. When she had secured a place, the sensation of kneeling was in itself a joy. To hide the tears upon her cheeks she was forced to bury her face in her hands, and in the soft snoring of the organ recollections of her life frothed up, drowning her heart in illimitable and unexplained sorrow. Her whole life seemed to be weeping within her, and in meaningless distraction she regretted she had ever been born. But as the psalm proceeded her excitement abated, until at last it subsided into a state of ecstasy, full at once of cruelty and sweetness, out of which she made no effort to lift herself. And it was not until the congregation kneeled down with one accord for the extemporary prayer that, obeying a sudden impulse, she passionately demanded grace and pardon for her child. But the effort exhausted her, and she relapsed into reveries. She saw in herself a sort of helpless martyr to circumstances, and unconsciously she drew comparisons between the life she led and the life she had hoped to attain. She remembered the materialism of her existence, the coarse conversation that made virtue of vice, the constant parade of body, the strains of sensual music, whose rhythm expressed not love nor reverence but lust and cynicism.

And these sad beatitudes of mind were prolonged indefinitely through the day. It was midsummer, and out of the flame of light in the diaphanous shadow of the wide-spreading trees, watching the boats passing up the lucid river, they dreamed through the long afternoon, and in

spirit, at least, they were united perfectly and completely. She spoke of the decrees of fate, and hesitatingly he answered by a look, trembling lest he should say more and destroy the tenderness of the day. Everything delighted them; they had a thousand confidences to make, and to recount their impressions and opinions of life in general interested them beyond measure. It astonished them to find how their ideas coincided, and in secret they both wondered why they had never spoken to each other like this before. So enwrapped was he in the personality of the woman, so lost was he in the liquid felicities of her brown eyes, that it was a wearying effort to detach his thoughts from them; and when she asked him about his opera he could only tell her that he had heard her voice in the music as he composed it. Strong as was the artistic temperament in him, it was overpowered by the force of his love, it irritated him to think of his score; his desires slipped from it, and were obsorbed in the charms of the evening and the grace of Kate's melancholy attitudes.

Dick had only been mentioned occasionally, and whenever his name was pronounced the conversation fell awkwardly to the ground. She was willing to allow herself to drift on that rainbow-tinted current of sentiment whose reality, being less than that of a dream, is resisted by no woman, especially when her heart is inflamed with the ardours of a violent physical passion.

And while speaking of themselves their walk had been prolonged far into the country, and it was not until the certainty that the day was over forced itself through their thoughts that they commenced to speak definitely of Dick and the opera company, towards which they were journeying, carrying with them in their souls the corpse of their happiness. They had dined at a country inn, and now, saturated with tenderness, they walked towards Leamington. The ways were filled with Sunday strollers—mothers leading a tired child moved steadily forward; a drunken man staggered over a heap of stones; sweethearts chased each other; occasionally a girl, kissed from behind as she stretched to reach a honeysuckle, rent with a scream the sickly-colored, airless evening.

But through this pleasant day Kate's thoughts had lain on her mind heavy as lead. Sometimes in the excitement of conversation, now in the hurry of getting to the station in time, her apprehensions were lost sight of; but when the tickets were taken, and the train commenced rolling, with a slight oscillating motion, into the open country, to conceal her tears she looked away, pretending to be interested in the receding town. Dim masses of trees interrupted by spires and roofs were painted upon a huge orange-colored sky, that somehow reminded her of an opera bouffe. Then everything seemed to her but one horrible profanity.

"What are you crying for?" Montgomery asked, bending forward.

"Oh, I don't know!—nothing," exclaimed Kate, sobbing; "but I am very unhappy. I know I have been very wicked, and am sure to be punished for it."

"What nonsense! Who's going to punish you?"

"God will punish me—I know He will. I felt it all to-day in church. And when I think, I don't know what will become of me."

"I don't know what you have to complain of. You have made a success on the stage. I never saw any one get on so well in so short a time; and you are loved," he added with a certain bitterness, "as much as any woman could be."

"That's what you think, but I know better. I see him flirting every day with different girls."

"You imagine those things. Dick can't speak roughly to any one if he tried; but he doesn't care for any woman but you."

"Of course, you say so. You are his friend."

"I assure you, 'pon my word of honor; I wouldn't tell you so if it weren't true. You are—are you not?—my friend as much as he."

So penetrated were these words with an accent of strained feeling that Kate raised her eyes to Montgomery. Then, as if afraid that she should read his thoughts, he added:

"I am sure he hasn't kissed any one since he knew you. I can't put it plainer than that, can I?"

"I am glad to hear you say so. I don't think you would

tell me a lie; it would be too cruel, wouldn't it? for you know what a position I'm in. If Dick were to desert me to-morrow what should I do? When I think of it, it frightens me to death; and I suppose it will have to come. It is always the way it ends, isn't it?"

"You're in a mournful humor. Why should Dick desert you? Where would he find a woman as pretty as you? And even if he did I don't see that it would be such an awful fate."

Startled, Kate raised her eyes suddenly and looked him straight in the face.

"What do you mean?" she said.

The abruptness of her question made him hesitate. In a swift instant he regretted having risked himself so far, and he reproached himself for being false to his friend; but the temptation was irresistible, and overcome by the tenderness of the day, and irritated by the memory of years of vain longing, he said,

"Even if he did desert you, you might, you would, find somebody better—somebody who would marry you."

They were alone in the railway-carriage, and during a long and nervous silence they listened to the rattle of the train. Outside the violet night rolled over the woodlands, and gazing at the one band of yellow that remained, a yellow like that of a tea-rose, each waited for the other to speak. It was one of those pauses which decide the destiny of lives. At last Kate said:

"I could never marry any one but Dick."

"Why? Do you love him so much?"

"Yes, I love him better than anything in the world; but even if I didn't there are reasons which would prevent my marrying any one but him."

"What reasons?"

Kate hung down her head. The subject was a delicate one, and she sought for words to make herself understood. She did not know if she ought to confide her secret to Montgomery, but a desire that some one should know of her trouble smothered all other considerations—but after another effort to speak she renounced the attempt. Still Montgomery persisted.

"Why? Tell me why you could not marry any one but Dick?"

The sound of his voice startled her, and then, in a moment of sudden naturalness, she answered:

"Because I'm in the family-way."

To Montgomery there was a blotting out of all things; a sheet of darkness seemed to have slipped before his mind, and a dull blind pain wrenched his heart. Logic there was none in his grief. This woman was not, could never be, anything to him. To speak to her of love would be to betray the confidence of his friend. All this he knew well, and yet the confession he had just heard was to him a sort of annihilation. The rattle of the train shook emptily in his ears, and his thoughts pressed him into a state of mute stupor—mute for he dare not utter a cry; silence was imposed upon him. Kate knew he was suffering, but the intensity of her own feelings did not leave her time for pity. The thought, why, after all, should she not marry Dick? shot through her mind in such piercing fervor that she remained as if transfixed, seeing in a dream a distant vision of white. Why should she not marry Dick? The words sang like violins in her ears. What was there prevent it? Nothing. What a fool she had been! Why had she not asked for this reparation before? In a second her life had become illuminated and animated, and in a deep, tranquillity of mind she savored the sweetness of her joy, as a convalescent might a bouquet of freshly culled violets.

"Then why don't you marry him?" said Montgomery hoarsely.

The words that were death-knells to him were marriage bells in her ears, and she said, speaking out of her hope like a prisoner out of his cell:

"Perhaps he will marry me when I tell him all—I am sure he will."

"What! haven't you told him what you told me?"

"No," Kate answered timidly; "I was afraid to."

"Then you must do so at once," exclaimed Montgomery, now waking up vigorously from his lethargy; and the poor vagrant musician whom nobody had ever loved said, and it was an act of heroic courage,

"I will speak to him about it the first time I get a chance. He must marry you. It would be wicked of him not to. He couldn't refuse, even if he didn't love you, which he does."

The last streak of yellow had now died out of the sky, in the dusky meadows the cattle slept under the light of a few shimmering stars, and, penetrated with a sentiment of fathomless content, Kate watched the flying landscape. So ended the day that had begun so sweetly for both. She pitied him from the bottom of her heart; but being a woman what could she do but look at him with eyes full of gratitude, and murmur as he developed his plans to her, "I am sure it is very good of you to take such an interest in me."

CHAPTER XVIII

IN Bath Kate scored an immense success. She was applauded to the echo in *Madame Angot* and *Les Cloches de Corneville.* As Clairette and Serpolette she was declared to be equally perfect. Dick was enthusiastic, and he talked extravagantly of how she would eclipse the London prima donnas when they went up to town. In general lines he sketched out a hundred projects for getting a new work over from France, in which Kate would create the principal part. The only points on which he was not decided were, which of his three illustrious composers he should choose for the music, and which London theatre it would be most suitable to take a lease of. These discussions rendered Montgomery very irritable. He was willing to dream of a London theatre till daylight dawned, but the eulogies passed on M. Hervé rendered him desperate, and the conversationel ruses he employed to get back to his own opera were most ingenious.

Opposite the two men, lying back in an armchair, Kate listened. Their arguments wearied her. Her thoughts were bent too firmly on her marriage. Would he or would he not make her his wife when she told him all? she asked herself night and day. Sometimes she fancied he would, and then the sweetness of the idea brought a smile to her lips; but remembering that not in all the books she had read could she recall a single instance of a man marrying his mistress, she grew frightened.

"Oh! when will they cease talking of their horrible theatres?" she would say to herself. "Who cares whether Offenbach or Hervé writes the best music?" Even when they spoke of herself, and in glowing terms praised her performance of Clairette, she was but faintly interested. Upon a stock of many generations of middle-class people, people whose ideas had ever been confined to a routine of material and spiritual life, both being accepted as earnestly

as uninquiringly, the artistic graft had taken but sparingly; and it was clear that as soon as the bonds of love that bound it were taken off, it would fall as an excrescence, rejected by hereditary instincts. Already her marriage took far greater importance in her eyes than any stage success. Already her mind was tinged with dreams that were but an echo of her first life in Hanley. Anything to stay this horrible weekly journey that was driving her mad. Even her confinement, far distant as it was, seemed to her like an assurance of rest; and she thought of the long hours of weak peace, when Dick, sitting reading to her, could be hers as he had never been. And the baby—it would unite them; they could never be parted then. Ah! all would yet be well if he would marry her.

The Monday and Tuesday at Bath she spent considering how the demand—for she was determined that it should take the form of a demand—should be put to him. It had always been vaguely understood that they were to be married—that is to say, it had been taken for granted that when they had time, when a fitting occasion presented itself, they would render their cohabitation legal. This understanding had till now satisfied her. In her happiness she had not thought of pressing matters, and Dick, who let a thing slide until the iron rod of necessity pushed it down his throat, had not troubled himself about the matter. Nothing this man loved so ardently as to talk about work to be done, but only an expectation of the most immediate result could induce him to execute any of his projects, and his marriage he treated exactly as he did his theatrical speculations. Of course he intended they should be married; there was no doubt about it; but there was no hurry—some time later on, when they were more settled.

In her present mode of mind these answers were to Kate especially exasperating. She however tried to keep her temper, and to speak calmly.

"But Dick, dear, why not at once? Remember the life of sin we are leading. You don't know how miserable it makes me."

Out of his animal repose Dick smiled at this argument.

If there was one thing more than another that irritated her it was to be laughed at, and, being always on the watch for a sneer, she naturally made some startling discoveries in that way. On the present occasion the blood rushed instantly to her face, and she exclaimed:

"If you did seduce me, if you did drag me away from my peaceful home, if you did make a travelling actress of me, there is one thing you might refrain from doing, that's insulting my religion!"

"Dick looked up surprised. Kate had put down her knife and fork—they were finishing dinner—and was pouring herself out a large glass of sherry. She was evidently going to work herself up into one of her rages. Her fingers trembled and the brown eyes were full of gold light.

"I assure you, my dear, I never intended to insult your religion, and I wish you wouldn't drink all that wine, it only excites you."

"Excites me! What does it matter to you if I excite myself or not?"

"My dear Kate, this is very foolish of you. I don't see why—if you will only listen to reason——"

"Listen to reason!" she said, spilling the sherry over the table, "ah! it would have been better if I had never listened to you."

"You really mustn't drink any more wine; I can't allow it," said Dick, passing his arm across her and trying to take away the decanter.

This was the climax, and, her pretty face curiously twisted, she screamed as she struggled away from him—

"Leave me go, will you! leave me go! Oh, I hate you!" Then clenching her teeth, and more savagely, "No, I will not be touched! No! no! no! I will not!"

So astonished was Dick at this burst of passion that he loosed for a moment the arms he was holding, and Kate, profiting by the opportunity, seized him by the frizzly hair with one hand and dragged the nails of the other down his face.

At this unpropitious moment Montgomery entered, stopping suddenly with lifted eyebrows and open mouth,

he stood aghast, and Kate, whose anger had now expended itself, burst into a violent fit of weeping. Dick wiped the blood from his cheek.

"What does this mean?" said Montgomery, speaking very slowly.

Neither answered. The man sought for words; the woman walked about the room, swinging herself. Not knowing what to make out of it, Montgomery appealed to Kate, and as she passed before him he stopped her and begged for an explanation. She gave him a swift look of grief, and, breaking away from him, shut herself in the bedroom. The two men were then alone.

"What does this mean?"

Dick looked round vaguely, astonished at the authoritative way the question was put, but without inquiring he answered:

"That's what I want to know. I never saw anything like it in my life. We were speaking of being married, when suddenly Kate accused me of insulting her religion, and then—well, I don't remember any more. She got into such a passion—you saw it yourself."

"Did you say you wouldn't marry her?"

"No, on the contrary. I can't make it out. For the last month her caprices, fancies, and jealousies have been something awful!"

Montgomery made a movement as if he were going to reply, but checking himself, he remained silent. His face then assumed the settled appearance of one who is inwardly examining the different sides of a complex question. At last he said:

"Let's come out for a walk, Dick, and we'll talk the matter over."

"Do you think I can leave her?"

"'Tis the best thing you can do. Leave her to have her cry out."

Adopting the suggestion, Dick picked up his hat, and without further words the men went out of the house, walking slowly arm in arm.

"I cannot understand what is the matter with Kate. When I knew her first she hadn't a bad temper."

To this Montgomery made no answer. He was thinking.

After a pause Dick continued, as if speaking to himself:

"And the way she does badger me with her confounded jealousies. I'm afraid now to tell a girl to move up higher on the stage. There are explanations about everything, and I can't think what it is all about. She has everything she requires. She hasn't been a year on the stage, and she is playing leading parts, and scoring successes too."

"Perhaps she has reasons you don't know of."

"Reasons I don't know of? What do you mean?"

"Well, you haven't told me yet what the row was about."

"Tell you! That's just what I want to know myself!"

"What were you speaking about when it began?" asked Montgomery, who was still feeling his way.

"About our marriage."

"Well, what did you say?"

"What did I say? I really don't remember; the row has put it all out of my head. Let me think. I was saying—I mean she was asking me when we should be married."

"And what did you say to that? Did you fix a day?"

"Fix a day!" said Dick, looking in atsonishment at his friend. "How could I fix a day?"

"I think if I loved a woman and she loved me I would manage somehow to fix a day."

These words were spoken with an earnestness that attracted Dick's attention, and he looked inquiringly at the young man.

"So you think I ought to marry her?"

"Think you ought to marry her?" exclaimed Montgomery indignantly; "really, Dick, I did not think you were —— Just remember what she has given up for you. You owe it to her. Good heavens!"

"Well, you needn't get into a passion; I've had enough of passions for one day."

The impetuousness of the youth had struck through the fat nonchalance of the man, and he said after a pause:

"Yes, I suppose I do owe it to her."

The apologetic, easygoing air with which this phrase

was spoken maddened Montgomery; he could have struck his friend full in the face, but for the sake of the woman he was obliged to keep his temper.

"Putting aside the question of what you owe and what you don't owe, I'd like to ask you whether you could find a nicer wife? She is the prettiest woman in the company, she is making now five pounds a week, and she loves you as well as ever a woman loved a man. I should like to know what more you want."

This was very agreeable to hear, and after a moment's reflection Dick said:

"That's quite true, my boy, and I like her better than any other woman. I don't think I could get anything better. If it weren't for that infernal jealousy of hers. Really, her temper is no joke."

"Her temper is all right; she was as quiet as a mouse when you knew her first. Take my word for it, there are excellent reasons for her being a bit put out."

"What do you mean?"

"Can't you guess?"

The two men stopped and looked each other full in the face. Montgomery stood the examining gaze, and then resuming his walk, said:

"Yes, it is so; she told me in the train coming up from Leamington."

Tears glittered in Dick's eyes, and he became in that moment all pity, kindness, and good-nature.

"Oh, the poor dear! Why did she not tell me that before? And I was scolding her for being ill-tempered."

His humanity was as large as his fat, and although he had never thought of the joys of paternity, now, in the warmth of his sentiments, he melted into one feeling of rapture. After a pause, he said:

"I think I had better go back and see her."

"Yes, I think you had better; fix a day for your marriage."

"Of course."

Nothing further was said, and absorbed each in different thoughts, the two men retraced their steps. When they arrived at the door, Montgomery said:

"I think I had better wish you good-by."

"No, come in, old man, she'd like to see you."

And as if anxious to torture himself to the last, Montgomery entered. Kate was still locked in the bedroom, but there was such an unmistakable accent of trepidation and anxiety in Dick's fingers and voice that she opened immediately. Her beautiful black hair was undone, and fell in rich masses about her. Dick took her in his arms, and held her sobbing on his shoulder. All he could say was, "Oh, my darling, I am so sorry; you will forgive me, won't you?"

CHAPTER XIX

ELL, what are you going to give her? Do you see anything you like here?"

"Do you think that paper-cutter would do?"

"You can't give anything more suitable, ma'am. Then there are these card-cases; nobody could fail to like them."

"What are you going to give, Annie?"

"Oh, I'm going to give her a pair of earrings we saw yesterday; but if I were you I wouldn't spend more than half a sovereign—it's quite enough."

"I should think so indeed—a third of a week's screw," whispered Dolly, "but she ain't a bad one, and Dick will like it, and may give me a line or so in *Olivette*. How do you think she'll do in the part?"

"We'll talk about that another time. Are you going in for the paper-cutter?"

Casting her eyes in despair around the walls of the fancy-goods shop to see if she could find anything she liked better, Dolly decided in favor of the paper-cutter and, after a feeble attempt at bargaining, paid the money.

In the street they saw Moritimer coming along. All heads were turned to look at him. He had now allowed his hair to grow in long, snake-like curls completely over his shoulders, and he wore a frock-coat with tails reaching to the knees.

"For goodness sake come away," cried Beaumont, "I do hate speaking to him in the street, everybody stares so."

The girls turned to fly, but the heavy lead was upon them, and in his most nasal tones said:—

"Well, my dear young ladies, engaged in the charming occupation of buying nuptial gifts?"

"How very sharp you are, Mr. Mortimer," answered Dolly in her pertest manner; "and what are you going to give? We should so much like to know."

After a moment's hesitation he said, throwing up his chin after the manner of a model sitting for a head of Christ:—

"My dear young lady, you must not exhibit your curiosity in that way; it is not modest."

"But do tell us, Mr. Mortimer; you are a person of such good taste."

The comic tragedian considered for a moment what he could say most ill-natured and so get himself out of his difficulty.

"I tell you, young lady, I am not decided, but I think that a copy of Wesley's hymns bound up with the book of the *Grand Duchess* might not be inappropriate."

Spite passes currently for wit, and Mortimer glided out of his difficulty. The question of the marriage was then discussed, and Dick's wisdom in thus pairing for ever prophetically commented upon. Kate's talent received some hard critical knocks, and finally it was agreed that the luck lay for her in their going to Liverpool just after the row. Otherwise, Beaumont declared, there would have been no marriage.

"You must be in a town a fortnight. I know that to my cost, for when Lord Wedmore sent me out on tour with the *Dragon Fly*—well, no matter about that. You have to be a fortnight in a place before you can get a license, and when are we a fortnight anywhere? In Blackpool we were, but she wasn't divorced then. Lord! we might have gone on until the end of next year, and he'd have got tired of her by that time. I know Dick."

"Quite so," said Dolly reflectively, "and as it was, to make up the time they had to leave us in the middle of the week at Bath."

"But how do you think she'll play the Countess?" asked Beaumont.

"Oh, we mustn't speak of that now she's going to be married," and, thinking he could not better this last remark, Mortimer bade the ladies good-by and went off with curls and coat-tails alike swinging in the breeze. Farther up the street Beaumont and Dolly were joined by Leslie, Bret, and Dubois, and the same topics were again

discussed. "What are you going to give?" "Have you bought your present?" "Have you seen mine?" "Do you know who's going to be at the wedding breakfast? They can't ask more than a dozen or so." "Have you heard that the chorus have clubbed together to buy Dick a chain?" "It is very good of them, but they'll feel hurt at not being asked to the breakfast." "What will the Lennoxes do?" These and a hundred other questions of a similar sort had been asked in the dressing-rooms, in the wings, in the streets, at every available moment since Morton and Cox's opera bouffe company had arrived in Liverpool. Everybody professed to consider the event the happiest and most fortunate that could have happened, but Mortimer's words, "There's many a slip between the ring and the finger," recurred to them whenever the conversation came to a pause, and they hoped the marriage might yet be averted even when they stood one bright summer morning assembled on the stage, there awaiting the arrival of the bride and bridegroom. The name of the church had been kept a secret, and all that was known was that Leslie—who had joined another company in Liverpool—Bret, Montgomery, and Beaumont had gone to attend as witnesses, and that they would be back at the theatre at twelve to run through the third act of *Olivette* before producing it that night.

Many false alarms were given, but when at last the bridal party walked from the wings on to the stage they were received with cheers and long congratulations. Dick's appearance provoked a little good-natured laughter, so respectable did he look in a spick and span new frock-coat, and his tall hat, much too small for him, gave a curiously incongruous look to his big face. Kate had never looked prettier; Mortimer said her own husband would not know her. She wore a dark green silk plaited down the front, from underneath which a patent-leather boot peeped as she walked; a short jacket showed the drawing of her shoulders, the delicacy of her waist, and the graceful fall of the hips. She carried in her hand a bouquet of yellow and pink roses, a present from Montgomery.

"Now, ladies and gentlemen, I won't detain you long, but do let us run through the third act, so as to have it right for the night. Montgomery, will you oblige me by playing over that sailor chorus?"

Then, to the tinkling of the piano, Dick took the girls in sections and placed them in the positions he desired them to hold.

"Now then; enter the Countess. Who's in love with the Countess?"

"Well, if you don't know, I don't know who does," said Mortimer. "I hear you have been swearing all morning 'till death do us part.'"

Roars of laughter greeted this pleasantry, and Dick himself could not refrain from joining in it. At last he said:

"Now, Kate dear, do leave off laughing and run through your song."

"I—I—ca—n't—can—'t; you—you—are—t—t—too fu—nny."

"We shall never get through this act," said Dick, who had just caught Miss Leslie walking off with Bret into the green-room. "Now, Miss Leslie, can't you wait until this rehearsal is over?"

"They'll be late for church to-day; they may as well wait."

Another roar of laughter followed this remark, and Kate said:

"You had better give it up, Dick, dear; it will be all right at night. I assure you I shall be perfect in my music and words."

"I must go through the act. The principals are responsible for themselves, but I must look to the chorus. Where's that damned property-master?"

On the subject of rehearsals Dick was always firm, and seeing that it could not be shirked, the chorus pulled themselves together, and the act was got through somehow. Then a few more invitations were whispered in the corners on the sly, and the party in couples and groups repaired to the Lennoxes' lodgings. Mortimer, Beaumont, Dick, and Kate walked together, talking of the night's show. Dubois crushed his bishop's hat over his eyes, straddled

his ostler-like legs, and discussed Wagner's position in music with Montgomery and Dolly Goddard. A baronet's grandson, a chorus-singer, told how his ancestor had won the Goodwood Cup half a century ago, to three ladies in the same position in the theatre as himself. Bret and Leslie followed very slowly, apparently more than ever enchanted with each other.

For the wedding breakfast, the obliging landlady had given up her own rooms on the ground-floor. The table extended from the fireplace to the cabinet, the panels of which Mortimer was respectfully requested not to break when he was invited to take the foot of the table and help the cold salmon. The bride and bridegroom took the head, and the soup was placed before them; for this was not, as Dick explained, a breakfast served by Gunter, but a dinner suitable to people who had been engaged for some time back. At this joke no one knew if they should laugh or not, and Mortimer slyly attracted the attention of the company to Bret and Leslie, who were examining the cake.

Then all spoke at once of the presents. They were of all sorts, and had come from different parts of the country. Mr. Cox had given a large diamond ring. Leslie had presented Kate with a handsome inkstand. Bret had bought her a small gold bracelet. Dubois, whose fancies were light, offered a fan; Beaumont, a pair of earrings; Hayes, a cigarette case; Dolly Goddard a paper-knife; Montgomery, a brooch which must have cost him at least a month's salary. Mortimer exclaimed that his wife had been behaving rather badly lately, and that, &c. But Dick could not listen to his excuses, so overpowered was he when he found on the table a thick gold chain sent to him from the ladies of the chorus. Their intention had been ingeniously kept a secret, and resolving that the surprise should be a complete one, they had kept back their gift till the last moment. The kindness of the girls seemed to affect him deeply, and, interrupting Kate, who was thanking her friends for all their tokens of good-will, he said:

"I must really thank the ladies of the chorus for the very handsome present they made me. How sorry I am that they are not all present to receive my thanks I cannot

say; but those who are here will, I hope, explain to their comrades how we were pressed for place."

"One would think you were refusing a free admission," snarled Mortimer.

"What a bore that fellow is," whispered Dick to Mr. Cox, the proprietor of the company, who had come down from London to arrange some business with his manager.

"I am sure, Mr. Lennox, we were only too glad to be able to give you something to show you how much we appreciate your kindness," said a tall girl, speaking in the name of the chorus.

"We must have some fizz after the show to-night on the stage. What do you think, Cox?" said Dick. "And then I shall be able to express my thanks to every one."

"And we must have a dance," cried Leslie. "My foot is all right now."

To seat the fifteen people who had been invited, chairs had to be fetched in from the bedroom, and even from the kitchen. They were a curious assortment. The ladies did not like sitting together, and the supply of men was not sufficient. But these were slight drawbacks, and when the first few spoonfuls of soup had been eaten and the sherry tasted, every one wanted to know about Mr. Cox. The women examined him with looks of deep inquiry, but his face told them nothing; it was grave and commercial, and he spoke little to any one except Kate and her husband. In the middle of the table the baronet's son sat with the three chorus-girls, whom he continued to pester with calculations as to how much he would be worth, but for his ancestor's ambition to win the Derby with Scotch Coast. Leslie and Bret were on the other side of the wedding-cake, and they bent and leant towards each other with a thousand little amorous movements. Beaumont and Dolly Goddard spoke vigorously of the evening's performance, and the former, under pretext of questioning Montgomery on certain points connected with the singing of one of her songs, strove to attract Mr. Cox's attention.

"Do you think, Mr. Montgomery, that I ought to take an encore—that is to say, if I get one—for my song, 'The

Torpedo and the Whale?' If I do, will it interfere with the action of the piece?"

"I never heard a lady putting the piece before herself," said Montgomery, with a loud laugh. He, too, was anxious to attract Mr. Cox's attention, and availing himself of Miss Beaumont's question as a "lead-up," he said, "I hope that when my opera is produced I shall find artists who will look as carefully after my interests."

"But when will you have your opera ready?" said Kate, who saw that she could do something to help her friend. Their eyes met for a moment, and they read each other's thoughts in a look. Montgomery's were, "Oh, how bitter it is to lose you like this. You don't know how I love you. No one, I feel sure, could make you as happy as I could." Hers were, "I am so sorry for you; I really, really am. I know that you like me very much, although you never told me so. But you know I love Dick. Still, I hope we shall remain good friends."

"My opera?" he said, as soon as she averted the brown eyes that burnt into his soul. "It is all finished. It is ready to put on the stage when Dick likes."

The ruse proved successful, for Mr. Cox, bending forward, said in an interested voice:

"May I ask what is the subject of your opera, Mr. Montgomery?"

This was charming, and the musician at once proceeded to enter into a complicated explanation, in which frequent allusion was made to a king, a band of conspirators, a neighboring prince, a beautiful daughter unfortunately in love with a shepherd, and a treacherous minister. Beaumont listened wearily, and, seeing that no mention she could make of her singing would avail her, she commenced to fidget abstractedly with one of her big diamond earrings. In the meanwhile, Montgomery's difficulties were increasing. To successfully follow the somewhat intricate story of king, conspirators, and amorous shepherd a sustained effort of attention was necessary, and this Dick, Kate, and Mr. Cox found it difficult to grant. For in the middle of a somewhat involved bit—in which it was not quite clear whether the king or the minister had entered

disguised—the landlady would beg to be excused—if they would just make a little way, so that she might remove the soup.

This lady, in her Sunday cap, assisted by the maid-of-all-work, from whose canvas-grained hands soap and water had not been able to extract the dirt, strove to lift large dishes of food over the heads of the company. There was a sirloin of beef that had to be placed before Mortimer. Then came two pairs of chickens, the carving of which Dick had taken upon himself. A piece of bacon with cabbage, and a pigeon-pie, adorned the sides of the table. The cutlets were handed round.

Then for some time conversation gave way to the more necessary occupation of eating; but as it had been arranged at the head of the table that Montgomery was to play, when they went upstairs, some of the principal numbers of his opera over to Mr. Cox, silent with hope he applied himself to devouring a plate of beef. Even Bret and Leslie left off billing and cooing; the grandson of the baronet, forgetful of his family's misfortunes on the turf, dug vigorously into and liberally distributed the pigeon-pie. The clattering of knives and forks swelled into a sustained sound, which was only broken by observations such as "Thanks, Mr. Lennox, anything that's handy—a leg, if you please." "May I ask you, Montgomery, for a slice of bacon. No cabbage, thank you." "Mr. Mortimer, a little and some gravy; that'll do nicely."

It was not until the first helping had been put away, and eyes began to wander in search of what would be best to go on with, that conversation was resumed. To mollify Mortimer, who had had a good deal of trouble with the beef, Dick said, "I hope you are satisfied with your part, Mortimer, and that we shall have some good roars. The piece ought to go with a scream."

"I think I shall knock 'em this time, old boy," said the comic man, drawling his words slowly through his nose. "It pretty well killed me when I read it over to myself, so I don't know what it will be when I spit it out at them."

This was deemed unnecessarily coarse, and for a moment it was feared that Mortimer was as drunk as Mr. Hayes,

whose eyes were now beginning to blink pathetically. He awoke up, however, with a start and a smile when the first champagne cork went off, and holding out his glass, said, "Shall be very glad to drink your health, a wedding only comes once in a life."

Mortimer tried to turn the embarrassing pause that followed this remark to his profit. The beef having kept him silent during the early part of the dinner, he resolved now to prove what a humorist he was, and by raising his voice he strove to attract to himself the attention of the company. This, however, was not easily done. Dubois had begun to pinch the canvas-handed maid, who was lifting a plate of custards over his head; but these frivolities did not prevent him from discussing Carlyle's place in English literature with the baronet's son on his left, and arguing, from time to time, against certain effects employed by Wagner in his orchestration with Montgomery on his right. Kate often laid down her spoon and stared vaguely into space. Under the table she had laid her hand on Dick's. She was very happy. Her life seemed to her ended—to have been perfectly accomplished. The past seemed now to be completely blotted out. What more could she desire? She would go on acting, and Dick would continue to love her. By some special interposition of Providence all the hazards of existence over which she might have fallen appeared to have been swept aside. What broader road could a woman hope to walk in than the one that lay before her in all its clear and bland serenity? Oh, how good God had been to her! how good He was going to be! Her child! his child! What sweetness there was in the words! and what a tie it would be to them! what a source of future happiness! Would it not give them courage to work? would it not give them strength to live? It would be something to hope for. Already she speculated if it would be a boy or a girl. She saw herself sitting by the cradle; she already imagined the vacant, staring blue eyes, and felt the round, plump limbs. Oh, how good God had been to her; and how wicked she had been to Him! Tears dimmed her eyes, and her heart filled with a fervor of faith she had never felt before; and facing the gracious future

which a child and husband promised her, she offered up thanksgivings for her happiness, which she accepted as eternal, so inherent did it seem in herself. The murmur of friendly voices rang in her ears; she looked up at the table, seeing nothing but smiling lips, until her eyes fell on Mr. Hayes. His face was now nearly hidden in his voluminous white waistcoat, and a richly-ringed hand caressed the famous silky beard.

"Oh, just look at him!" said Kate, waking up with a start from her reveries. "How can he make such a beast of himself?"

"Don't take any notice of him, dear; that's the best way."

But the advice came too late. Mortimer, who had been vainly struggling for the last five minutes to draw Beaumont from the memory of a lord, Dubois from his Wagnerian argument, and Bret and Leslie from their flirtation, now seized on poor Hayes's drunkenness as a net wherein he could capture everybody. Raising his voice so as to ensure silence, he said, addressing himself to Mr. Cox at the other end of the table, "How very affecting he is now, how severely natural; the innocence of a young girl in her teens is not, to my mind, nearly so touching as that of a boozer in his cups. Have you ever heard how he fancied the waiter was calling him in the morning when the policeman was hauling him off to the station?"

Mr. Cox had not heard; and consequently the whole story of how they bumped in the hotel door at Derby had to be gone through. Having thus got the company by the ear, Mortimer showed for a long time no signs of letting them go. He went straight through his whole repertoire. He told of a man who wanted to post a letter, but not being able to find the letter-box, he applied to a policeman. The bobby showed him something red in the distance, and explained that that was the post. "Keep the red in your eye, my boy," said the drunkard; and this he did until he found himself in a public-house trying to force his letter down a soldier's collar. He had mistaken the red coat for the pillar. This was followed by a story of a man who apologized to the trees in St. James's Park, and ex-

plained to them that he had come from a little bachelor's party, until he at last sat down saying, "This no good; I mus—mush wait till the pro—prochession has passed." Mr. Cox, to whom these anecdotes were all new, laughed prodigiously; and thus encouraged, Mortimer told stories of tippling drollery, until most of those present eyed the champagne as if considering if it were possible to drink themselves out of their misery. The men especially looked doleful, for they well knew that when the ladies left the room Mortimer would start his series of dirty stories, and that they knew could be prolonged indefinitely.

Montgomery's face especially assumed an appearance of extreme dejection. When he was sad his long nose appeared to grow longer; and now as he thought of his opera, it seemed like competing for length with Mortimer's loquacity. Indeed, there were times when the musician looked as if he despaired of all things, and when he gazed at the clock his face was expressive of the most utter misery. But a heavy digestive indifference to everything was written on each countenance; and in the slanting rays of the setting sun the curling smoke vapors assumed the bluest of tints. Odors of spirits trailed along the tablecloth. Disconnected fragments of conversation, heard against the uninterrupted murmur of Mortimer's story-telling voice, struck the ear. The baronet's son was now explaining to his three ladies that no woman could expect to get on in life unless she was very immoral or very rich; Dubois argued across the table with Leslie and Bret concerning the poduction of the voice; Beaumont exchanged luminous and provoking glances with Mr. Cox; Dick talked to Kate of the inartistic methods of most stage managers in arranging the processions. Mr. Hayes slept heavily, and his snores were beginning to attract attention. In Montgomery's ears they sounded as music, suggesting as they did to him, a possible "cue" for the break-up of the party. If they delayed much longer he would not have time to play his opera to Mr. Cox.

It was Kate, however, who first read the meaning of his despairing glances at the clock, and she whispered to Dick that the cake had not yet been cut. This was an import-

ant consideration, and when she rose to distribute the white-sugared emblem of love and fidelity the wedding party awoke to a burst of enthusiasm. Every one suggested something, and much whisky and water was spilt on the tablecloth.

But matters, although they were advanced a stage, did not seem to be much expedited. The bride's health had to be drunk, and Dick had to return thanks. He did not say very much, but his remarks concerning Olivette suggested a good deal of comment. Mortimer took a different view of the question, and Dubois explained at length how the piece had been done in France. Leslie insisted that Bret should say something; and once on his legs, to the surprise of everybody, the silent tenor became of the most surprising garrulity. To Montgomery this was a terrible ordeal. His waltz tune, his opening chorus, his serenade, were running together in his head, and he trembled with excitement: twenty times he asked himself, "Will this never end?" At last, in pity for him, Kate made a sign to the ladies. Then skirts swung on the dress-improvers, color disappeared, and the room was left to the flat chests and tweed coats. The musician prayed that this after-dinner interval would not prove a long one; but he dreaded the dirty stories, and the door was no sooner closed than they began. The baronet's son sprang off with a clear lead, watched by Mortimer and Dubois. In the way of anecdotes these two would have been rivals had it not been for the latter's fancy for more serious discussions. Still in the invention and collection of the most atrocious, they both employed the energy and patience of the entomologist. A chance word, out of which a racy story might be extracted, was pursued like a rare moth or a butterfly. Dubois' were more subtle, but Mortimer's being more to the point, were more generally effective.

Eagerly they waited for the baronet's son to conclude, and he had hardly pronounced the last phrase when Mortimer, coming with a rush, took the lead with "That reminds me of——." Dubois looked discomfited, and settled himself down to waiting for another chance. This, however, did not come just at once; Mortimer told six stories,

each nastier than the last. Everybody was in roars except Montgomery and Dubois; whilst one thought of his opera, the other raked his memory for something that would out-Herod Mortimer. This was difficult, but when his turn came he surprised the company. Mr. Cox, as he leaned over the table with a glass of whisky and water in his hand, declared that he had never spent so pleasant a day in his life. And thus encouraged Dubois was just beginning to launch out into the intricacies of a fresh tale when Montgomery, beside himself with despair, said to Dick:

"It was arranged that I should play the music of my new opera over to Mr. Cox. If you don't put a stop to this it will go on for ever."

"Yes, my boy, it is getting a bit long, isn't it; just let Dubois finish and we'll go upstairs."

The story proved a weary one; but at last, like a long railway journey, it drew to an end, and they went upstairs. There they found the ladies yawning and looking at the presents. Kate ran to Dick to ask him to arrange about the music, but Beaumont had been a little before her and had taken Mr. Cox out on the balcony. Bret was not in the room; Leslie did not know the music, and in the face of so many difficulties, Dick's attention soon began to wander, and Kate was left to console the disappointed musician. Once or twice she attempted to renew the subject, but was told that they were all going down to the theatre in half-an-hour, that it had better be put off to another time.

Montgomery made no asnwer, but he could not cast off the bitter and malignant thought that haunted him, "I am as unfortunate in art as in love."

CHAPTER XX

THE date that marked the turning of the tide of prosperity that till now had favoured the "Co." was Kate's marriage. Somehow things did not seem to go well after. In the first place the production of *Olivette* was not a success. Mortimer was drunk, did not know his words, and went "fluffing" all over the shop. Kate, excited with champagne and compliments, on one occasion sang the wrong music, and to complete their misfortunes, the Liverpool public did not in the least tumble to Miss Beaumont's rendering of the part of the heroine. The gallery thought she was too fat, the papers said she was not sprightly enough, and on Wednesday night the old *Cloches* had to be put up. By this failure the management sustained a heavy loss. They had laid out a lot of money on dresses, property, and scenery, all of which were now useless to them; and the other two operas, having been on the road for the last three years, were beginning to droop and lose their drawing power. The country, too, was suffering from a great commercial crisis, and no one cared to go to the theatre. In many of the towns they visited strikes were on, and the people were convulsed with discussions, projects for resistance, and hopes of bettering their condition. Great social problems, the tyranny of capital, and such like, occupied the minds of men, and at such times there was naturally little taste for the laughing nonchalance of *La Fille de Madame Angot*, or the fooling of the Baillie in the *Cloches*. As forty thousand men had struck work, our band of travelling actors rolled out of Leeds, and they left it bearing with them only a reminiscence of empty benches, and street-corners crowded with idling, sullen-faced men. At Newcastle they were not more fortunate, at Wigan they fared even worse, at Hull it was equally bad. Gayety seemed to have fled out of the north; the public-house and the platform drew away the pit and the gallery;

the frequenters of the boxes and dress-circle remained at home, to talk around their firesides of their jeopardized fortunes. When the workers grow weary of work a hard time sets in for the sellers of amusement, and the fate of Morton and Cox's Operatic Company proved no exception to the rule. Money was made nowhere, and every Friday night a check for five-and-twenty pounds had to be sent down from London to make up the deficit in the salary list. For two months matters went on, nevertheless, very smoothly. The remembrance of large profits made in preceding years was still fresh in the minds of Messrs. Morton and Cox, and hoping always that business would soon begin to look up, they did not grumble much at losing in these hard times. But still, a constant drain of from five-and-twenty to forty pounds a week soon begins to tell, and after a big failure in the City, in which Mr. Cox was mulcted to the extent of a couple of thousand pounds, he began writing letters full of uneasiness to Dick. The first suggested that they had better look out for another opera. This was welcome news to everybody; but no sooner had Dick raised Montgomery to the seventh heaven of bliss, than he had to knock him down to earth again, by telling him that another letter had arrived from Mr. Cox, saying that no opera was to be put up; that it would be useless to try anything new in such bad times; that they had better try to reduce expenses instead.

"Reduce expenses? I don't know what he means. How are we to reduce expenses unless we reduce the salaries?"

"Nor do I," said Montgomery; "but the expense of mounting my piece would be very slight."

Without attempting to discuss so vain a question, Dick said, "I must speak to Hayes."

Hayes was sent round for. He pulled his silky whiskers, blinked his Chinese eyes, drank three glasses of whisky, and changed the position of his black bag several times; and the conversation gradually drifted into a long argument concerning the morality of leading actresses, and during the afternoon an interesting list of names was compiled.

This was an agreeable way of dealing with their difficul-

ties, and the matter was scarcely alluded to again until the following fortnight, when Dick found himself forced to write to Mr. Cox, demanding a check for thirty-five pounds, to meet Saturday's treasury and the current expenses of the following week. The check arrived, but the letter that came with it read very ominously indeed. It ran as follows:

"DEAR MR. LENNOX—I enclose you the required amount; but of course you will understand that this cannot go on. I intend running down to see you on Tuesday evening. Will you have the company assembled to meet me at the theatre, as I have an important explanation to make to them."

Dick had had too much experience in theatrical speculations not to know that this must mean either a reduction of salaries or a break-up of the tour; but as two whole days still stood between him and the evil hour, it did not occur to him to give the matter another thought, and it was not until they returned home after the theatre, to prepare for the Sunday journey, that he spoke of the letter he had received to Kate.

Their portmanteaus were spread out before them, and Kate was counting her petticoats when Dick said,

"I'll tell you what, Kate, I shouldn't be surprised if the company broke up shortly, and we found ourselves all obliged to look out for new berths."

"What do you mean?" she said, with a startled look on her face.

"Well, only that I think that Morton and Cox are beginning to get tired of losing money. We have been doing, as you know, very bad business lately, and I think they will give us all the sack."

"Give us all the sack!" repeated Kate, mechanically.

"Yes," said Dick, pursuing his own reflections, "I am afraid it is so. It is a deuced bore, for we were very pleasant together. But I don't think I showed you the letter I got this morning."

Taking it from his pocket he read it aloud; but when he raised his eyes to question her as to her opinion regarding it he could only ejaculate:

"What's the matter, dear?"

Pale as the petticoat at her feet, Kate stood with raised eyebrows and hands that twitched at the folds of her dress.

"Oh Dick! what shall we do? We shall starve; we sha'n't have any place to go to!"

"Starve!" said Dick in astonishment, "not if I know it. We shall easily find something else to do. Besides, I don't care if he does break up the tour. I believe there's a good bit of coin to be made out of the pier theatre at Blackpool. I've been thinking of it for some time. With a good entertainment, you know, and doing it as I should do it. Then you know there's the drama Harding did for me—a version of Wilkie Collins's story—*The Yellow Mask* —devilish good it is too. I was reading it the other day. We might take a company out with it. Let me see, whom could we get to play in it?" And, sitting over his portmanteau, the actor proceeded to cast the piece, commenting as he went along on the qualifications of the artists, and giving verbal sketches of the characters in the play. "Beaumont would play Virginie first rate, you know—a strong, determined, wicked woman, who stops at nothing I'd like to play the father; Mortimer would be very funny as the uncle. We'd have to write in something for you. You couldn't take the sympathetic little girl yet; you haven't had enough experience."

Then the expenses of scenery, properties, and posting were gone into, and different estimates were cast up in a dreamy and desultory manner. Kate looked at her husband vaguely, and plunged in a sort of painful wonderment, she asked herself how it was possible to stand on the brink of ruin, and thus calmly make plans for the future. To the actor, whose life had never run for a year without getting entangled in some difficult knot or other, the present hitch did not give the slightest uneasiness. A strange town to face and half-a-crown in his pocket might cause him some temporary embarrassment, but a hundred pounds at the bank, and the notoriety of having been for two years the manager of a travelling company, was to Dick an exceptionally brilliant start in life, and it did not occur to him to doubt that he would, as soon as he chose, hop into another shop as good as the one he had left. But as the

woman had been engaged in none of these anxious battles for existence, the news of a threatened break up of her world fell with a cruel shock upon her. She experienced the same dull nervous terror from which she had suffered in the early days when she had first joined the company, but in an aggravated form. For then the full tide of love and prosperity bore along their bark, and quieted her fears. But now in the first puff of the first squall she saw herself like one wrecked and floating on a spar in a wide and unknown sea of trouble. What was to become of them? she asked herself, as, sitting on the bed where she would never sleep again, she watched Dick counting on his fingers and looking dreamily into the spaces of some impossible future. The robes of the Bohemian, for the twentieth time since she had donned them, fell from her, and she became again in instincts and tastes a middle-class woman longing for a home, a fixed and tangible fireside where she might sit in the evening by her husband's side, mending his shirts, after the work of the day. A sour and deaf detestation of her wandering life rose to her head, and she longed to beg of her husband to give up theatricals, and try and find some other employment; and she saw herself looking after the daily household duties just as she did when she was Ralph's wife. She reproached herself for being such a wicked woman, and it appeared to her more than usually sinful to drive to the station as the church bells were chiming, and spend the hours that should have been passed in praying, in playing "nap," smoking cigarettes, and talking of wigs, make-ups, choruses, and such like. But apparently there was no help for it, and on Monday night, in her excitement, increased by the arrival of Mr. Cox, she could not help getting out of bed to beseech God to be merciful to them: her husband's heavy breathing often interrupted her, it told her that he was her husband, that was her only consolation, and it proved a supreme one.

It astonished her that he could sleep as he did, having in front of him the terrible to-morrow, when perhaps Mr. Cox would cast them adrift; and she trembled in every fibre when she stood on the stairs leading to the manager's room. There was a great crowd, the chorus-girls wedged themselves

into a solid mass, and murmured good mornings to each other; Mortimer told a long story from the top step, Dubois tried to talk of Balzac, whom he had not read, to Montgomery, who, fancying it was a question of a libretto, listened, at once puzzled and interested, whilst Bret, till now silent as the dead, suddenly woke up to the conclusion that it would probably all end in a reduction of salaries. At last Dick appeared and called them into the presence of Mr. Cox. Whiskey and water was on the table, and with the silky whiskers plunged in the black bag, Mr. Hayes fumbled aimlessly with many papers. The "boss," looking very grave, twitched at a heavy mustache. When they were all grouped about him, in his deepest and most earnest tones, he explained his misfortunes. For the last four months he had been forced to send down a weekly check of not less than five-and-twenty pounds, sometimes, indeed, the amount had run up to forty pounds. This, of course, could not go on forever, he had not the Bank of England behind him. But talking of banks, although there was no reason why he should inflict on them an account of his bad luck, he could not refrain from saying that had it not been for a certain bank (now, alas! well known to fame) he should not be forced to ask them to accept half salaries. The words brought a flush if indignation to Beaumont's cheeks. She made a slight movement, as if she were going to violently repudiate the suggestion, but the silence of those around calmed her, and she contented herself with murmuring to Dolly:

"This is an old dodge."

"I will leave you now," said Mr. Cox, "to consult among yourselves as to whether you will accept my proposal, or if you would prefer me to break up the tour at the end of the week, and pay you your fares back to London."

As Mr. Cox left the room there was a murmur of inquiry from the chorus ladies, and one or two voices heard above the rest were heard saying, that they did not know how they could manage on less than five-and-twenty shillings a week. These objections were soon silenced by Dick, who in a persuasive little speech explained that the reduction of salaries applied to the principals only.

"Then why derange these ladies and gentlemen by asking them to attend at this meeting?" said Mortimer.

To this question Dick made answer by telling the ladies and gentlemen of the chorus they might withdraw, and the discussion was resumed by those whom it concerned. Beaumont objected to everything. Bret spoke of going back to Liverpool. Dubois explained his opinions on the management of theatres in general, until Dick summoned him back to the point. Were they or were they not going to accept half salaries? At length the matter was decided by Mortimer getting upon a chair and shouting through his nose as through a pipe:—

"I don't know if you're all fond of hot weather, but if you are you'll find it to your taste in London, all the theatres are closed, and the cats are baking on the tiles."

This brought the argument to a pause, during which Beaumont remembered that grouse were shot in August, and settling her diamonds in her ears, she agreed that the tour was to be continued. A few more remarks were made, and then the party adjourned to a neighboring "pub" to talk of opera bouffes and bad business.

The next places they visited were Huddersfield and Bradford, but the houses they played to were so poor that Mr. Cox summoned a general meeting on the Sunday morning, and told them frankly that he could not go on losing money any longer; he would however lend them the dresses, and they might start a commonwealth if they liked. After much discussion it was decided to accept his offer, and the afternoon was spent in striving to decide how the business was to be carried on. A committee was at last formed. It consisted of Dick, Mortimer, Dubois, Montgomery, Bret, and Mr. Hayes, and as they went on to Halifax by an evening train, they settled that the chorus was, hit or miss, to be paid in full, and the takings then divided, proportionately to the salary previously received, among the principals.

In the face of the bad times it was a risky experiment, and Williams, the agent in advance, was anxiously looked out for at the station. What did he think? Was there a chance of their doing a bit of business in the town? Were there

bills up in all the public-houses? Williams did not at first understand this unusual display of eagerness, but when the commonwealth was explained to him, his face assumed as grave an expression as the pimples would allow it. He shoved his dust-eaten pot hot on one side, scratched his thin hair, and after some pressing, admitted reluctantly that he didn't think that they would do much good in the place; as far as he could see, everybody's ideas were on striking and politics; the general election especially was playing the devil with managers, at least that was what the company that had just left said.

This was chilling news, and, alas! each subsequent evening proved only the correctness of Mr. Williams's anticipations. Seven-pound houses were the rule. On Friday and Saturday they had two very fair pits, but this could not compensate for previous losses, and in the end when all expenses were paid, only five-and-thirty shillings remained to be divided among the principals. Their next try was at Oldham, but matters grew worse instead of better, and on Saturday night five-and-twenty shilings was sorrowfully portioned out in equal shares. It did not amount to much more than half-a-crown apiece. Rochdale, however, was not far distant, and, still hoping that times would mend, Morton and Cox's band of travelling actors sped on their way, dreaming of how they could infuse new life into their mumming, and whip up the jaded pleasure-tastes of the miners. But for the moment comic songs proved weak implements in the search for ore, and the committee sitting in the green-room, used likewise as a dressing-room by the two ladies, counted out a miserable four-and-ninepence as the result of a week's hard labour.

Beaumont fumed before the small glass, and arranged her earrings as if she anticipated losing them; Kate trembled and clung to her husband's arm, Montgomery cast glances at her of sentimental admiration, Mortimer tried to think of something funny, Dubois came to the point by asking:

"Well, what are you going to do with that four-and-ninepence? it is not worth dividing. I suppose we'd better drink it."

At the mention of drinks Mr. Hayes blinked and shifted the black bag from the chair to the ground.

"Yes, that's easily arranged," said Dick, "but what about the tour? I for one am not going on at four-and-ninepence a week."

"Sp—pend—it—in drinks," stuttered Mr. Hayes, awakening to a partial sense of the situation.

Everybody laughed, but in the pause that ensued each returned to the idea there was no use going on at four-and-ninepence a week.

"For we can't live on drink, although Beaumont can upon love," said Mortimer, determined to say something.

But the joke amused no one, and for some time only short and irrelevant sentences broke the long silences. At last Dick said:

"Well, then, I suppose we'd better break up the tour."

To this proposal no one made much objection. Murmurs came from different sides that it was a great pity, after having been so long together, that they should have to part company in this way. Montgomery and Dubois contributed largely to this part of the conversation, and through an atmosphere of whiskey and soap-suds arose a soft penetrating poetry concerning the delights of friendship. It was very charming to think and speak in this way, but all hoped, with perhaps the exception of Montgomery, that no one would insist too strongly on this point, for in minds of all new thoughts and schemes had already begun to germinate. Mortimer remembered a letter he had received from a London manager; Dubois saw himself hobnobbing again with the old "pals" in the Strand; Bret silently dreamed of Miss Leslie's dyed hair and blue eyes, and of his chances of getting into the same company.

"Then, if it is decided to break up the tour, we must make a subcription to send the chorus back to London," said Dick after a long silence.

Nobody till now had thought of these unfortunate people and their twenty-five shillings a week, but Dick, always ready to help a lame dog over a stile, planked down two "quid," and called on the others to do what they could in the same way. Mr. Hayes strewed the table instantly with

the money he had in his pocket. Mortimer spoke about his wife and mentioned details of an intimate nature to show how hard up he was, he nevertheless stumped up a "thin 'un." Beaumont, rampant at the idea of "parting," contributed the same. Indignant looks were levelled at her, and Dick continued to exhort his friends to be generous. "The poor girls," he declared, "must be got home; it would never do to leave them starving in Lancashire. Kate, touched by his kindness, gave a sovereign of her savings, and in this way something over ten pounds was made up, and with that Dick said he thought he could manage.

This man's humanity was infinite: the trouble he took to manage everything was marvellous. On Sunday, when Kate was at church, he was down at the railway station trying to find out what were the best arrangements he could make, and on Monday morning when they were all assembled on the platform to bid good-bye to their fellow-workers, it was curious to see this huge man, who at a first impression would be taken for a mere mass of sensuality, rushing about putting buns and sandwiches into paper bags for these his poor chorus girls, encouraging them with kind words, and when the train began to move, waving them large and unctuous farewells with his big hat.

Kate, who since the first shock of the threatened break up of the tour, had gradually grown accustomed to the idea, now wept in silence. Without precisely suffering from any pangs of fear for the future, an immense sadness seemed to ache within her very bones. All things were passing away. The flock of girls in whose midst she had lived was gone, a later train would take Mortimer to London, Bret was bidding them good-by, Beaumont was consulting a "Bradshaw." How sad it seemed. The theatre and artists, like a luminous dream, were vanishing into darkness. Not a day, nor an hour could she see in front of her.

"What shall we do now?" she whispered to Dick, as she trotted along by his side.

"Well, I haven't quite made up my mind. I was thinking last night that it wouldn't be a bad idea to make up a little entertainment—four or five of us—and see what we

could do in the manufacturing towns. Lancashire is, you know, honeycombed with them. Our travelling expenses would amount to a mere nothing. We must have some one to operate on the piano. I wonder if Montgomery would care about coming with us."

Kate knew perfectly well that he would, and as she happened at that moment to catch sight of the long tails of the Newmarket coat at the other side of the station, she begged of Dick to call to the erratic musician. No sooner was the proposition put forward than it was accepted, and in five minutes, at lunch in a "pub," they were arranging the details of the entertainment.

"We shall want an agent-in-advance, a bill-poster, or something of that kind," said Montgomery.

"I have thought of that," replied Dick; "Williams is our man, he'll see to all that, and I don't know if you know, but he can sing a good song on his own account."

"Can he? Well then we can't have any one better—and what shall we take out?"

"Well, we must have a little operetta, and I don't think we can do better than Offenbach's *Breaking the Spell*."

"Right you are," said Montgomery, pulling out his pocket-book. "*Breaking the Spell*, so far so good; now we must have a song or a character sketch to follow, and I don't think it would be a bad idea if we rehearsed a comedietta. What do you say to *The Happy Pair?*"

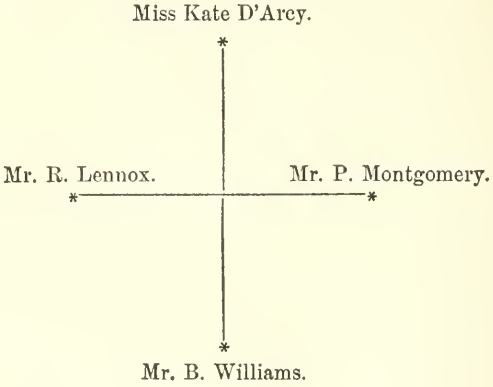
"Right you are, pencil it down, can't do better, it always goes well; and then I can sing between 'The Men of Garlic.'"

Montgomery looked a little awry at the idea of having to listen to the "Men of Garlic," sung by Dick, but in the discussion that followed as to what Kate was to do, the disagreeableness of the prospect was lost sight of.

As Dick anticipated, Williams declared himself delighted to accompany them in the double capacity of bill-poster and occasional singer; and after a fortnight's rehearsal at Rochdale, the Constellation Company started on its wanderings. Many drinks had been consumed in seeking for the name; many strange combinations of sound and sense had been rejected, and it was not until Dick

began to draw lines on a piece of paper, affixing names to the end of each, that the word suggested itself. What joy! What rapture! A rush was made to the printers, and in a few hours the following bill was produced—

THE CONSTELLATION COMPANY.



CHAPTER XXI

AS the Constellation Company drove to the station, Kate pointed out to Dick the curious resemblances that connected in her mind Rochdale with Hanley. Being still a little superstitious, the similarity the two towns bore to one another frightened her, and she discovered analogies between her present departure in life, and that she had made a year and a half ago, when she left her husband, Ralph Ede. How strange it was! Here was the same red town, narrow streets, built of a brick that, under a dull sky, glared to a rich geranium hue. The purplish tints of Hanley alone were wanting, but the heavy smoke-clouds, and the tall stems of the chimneys, were as numerous in Rochdale as in her native place. And, coincidence still more marvellous, nature had apparently helped and abetted what man's hand had contrived, for in either town a line of hills swept around the sky. The only difference was, that the characteristics of Rochdale were not so marked as those of Hanley. The lines of the hills, although conceived in the same spirit, were not so rigid and immutable as those of the Staffordshire town, nor did the Lancashire valley possess the same trenchlike appearance, as that which engirdles the potteries. Perhaps almost as much smoke hung over it; but it was not so black nor so arid. Between the collections of chimneys there were green undulations, water courses, trees, and stunted hedges, and these spread away until they disappeared amid the hills which in their turn rolled until lost in the waves of the surrounding country. Such is Lancashire; and as the train steamed along the high embankments, the actors talked of their comic songs.

Dick was going to sing "The Mulligan Guards" with Kate, and he pointed out during the course of the journey how admirably suited the country was to their kind of entertainment. Towns there were on all sides. Under

the green waste of a wold a chimney had been run up, sheds, and laborers' cottages had followed, and in five years, if the factory prospered, this beginning would swell into a village; in twenty, it would possess twenty thousand inhabitants. For just as in old times did the towns follow the castles, so now do they follow in the wake of the factories. Wolds and factories everywhere; the arsenic green sides of the former were striped with rough stone walls, or blackened with an occasional coal pit; the ridges were crested with trees, blown thin by the sea breezes; whilst in the distance, spread like pieces of a broken chain, extended the blue sharp lines of sheds spiked with long chimneys, and crowned with the lowering smoke-cloud, ever exuding and ever staining the white-trailing clouds that filled the autumn sky. Cold shafts of sunlight strayed for a moment on the dead green of the fields, pale as invalids taking the air for the last time before a winter's seclusion; and later on, when the light mists of evening enveloped the forms of the hills, the landscape took a strange swinging appearance, producing on the spectator a distinct sensation of mobility.

The first town the Constellation Company stopped at was Bacup. Williams, who had gone on in front, met them at the station. He declared that he had been in every public-house, that bills had been distributed everywhere, and that he had reason to believe that they would make a bit of money. His news was all good until Dick asked about lodgings. Then his pimples grew grave, and he confessed that he did not know what they should do. There was but one hotel, and all the rooms were taken. Dick, who on such occasions always took time by the forelock, insisted on starting at once on their search—and up and down the murky streets of the manufacturing town they walked until it was time for them to repair to the Mechanics' Hall, where they were going to play, and get ready for the entertainment.

The "Mulligan Guards" proved a great success, as did also the operetta, *Breaking the Spell*. Kate's pretty face and figure won the hearts of the factory hands, and she was applauded to the echo whenever she appeared on the

stage; and so frequent were the encores that it was half-past ten before they had finished their programme, and close on eleven before they got out of the hall into the street. Then the search for lodgings had to begin again. Montgomery and Williams, being single men, obtained beds, but Kate and Dick were not so easily satisfied, and they found themselves standing under a porch with the lights going out on all sides, and a wet prospect of spending the night in the street, under an umbrella, staring them in the face. At last Dick bethought himself of the police station, but on applying to a policeman he was directed to the back-door of a public-house. "He was pretty sure," whispered the boy in blue, "to get put up there." The door was opened with precaution, and they were allowed in. The place was full of people; it took them a long time to get served, and they were at length told that in the way of a room nothing could be done for them. Every bed in the house was occupied. Kate raised her eyes to Dick, but her look of misery was anticipated by a rough-faced carter who stood at the counter.

"You bear up, little woman," he said abruptly; "don't yo' look so froightent. Yo' shall both come up to my place, if yo' will; it isna up to much, but oi'll do th' best I can for yo'."

There was no mistaking the kindness with which the offer was made, though the idea of going to sleep at this rough man's house for the moment staggered even the mummer. But as it was now clear that they would have either to accept their new friend's hospitailty, or spend the night on a doorstep, it did not take them long to decide on the former alternative. Their only reason for hesitating was their inability to understand what were his motives for asking them to come to his place. Then, as if divining the reason of their uncertainty, he said:—

"I know yo' well, tho' yo' don't know me. I was up at the 'all to-night, and yo' did make me so laugh that I wouldna see yo' in the streets for nothing. Neaw, let it be yea or nay, master."

For answer, Dick put out his hand; and when he had thanked the hospitably-inclined carter put some questions

to him about the entertainment. Soon the two began to "pal," and after another drink they all went off together.

After wading down a few sloppy streets, he stopped before a low doorway, and ushered them into what looked like an immense kitchen. They saw rafters overhead and an open staircase ascending to the upper rooms, as might a ladder through a series of lofts. When a candle had been obtained the first thing their host did was to pull his wife out of bed, and insist on his guests getting into it, a request which the woman joined in as heartily as her husband, when the reason for this unceremonious awakening had been explained to her. And so wearied out were Kate and Dick, and so tempting did any place of rest look to them, that they could offer no opposition to the kind intentions of their host and hostess, and in their bed they slept heavily until roused next morning by a loud trampling of feet passing through their room. It was the family coming down from the lofts above, and as they descended the staircase they wished their guests a broad Lancashire good morning.

Then, when Kate and Dick had recovered from their astonishment, they dressed and went out to buy some provisions, which they hoped to be allowed to cook in the rough kitchen; but when they returned with their purchases they found the carter's daughter standing before an elaborately prepared breakfast, consisting of a huge beefsteak and a high pile of cakes.

"Lor, marm, why did yo' buy thoose things?" said the girl, disappointed.

"Well," said Kate, "we couldn't think of trespassing on you in that fashion. You must, you will, I hope, let us prepare our own breakfast."

"Feyther will never 'ear of it, I know," said the girl; and immediately after the carter with his brawny arms, pushed Kate and Dick down into two seats at the big table. Both cake and meat were delicious, and Dick's appetite showed such signs of outdoing the carter's that Kate, for mere shame, in the hope of diverting attention, commenced an interesting conversation with the buxom maiden by her side, and so successful were her efforts at agreeability that

a friendship was soon established between the women; and, when the morning's work was done, Mary, of her own accord, sought out Kate, and as she knitted the thick woollen stocking, was easily led into telling the inevitable love story.

We change the surroundings, but a heart bleeds under all social variations; and in this grim manufacturing town the bridal dress seemed, when taken out of its lavender and darkness, to possess a gleam of poetic whiteness that it could not have had even if set off by the pleasant verdure of a Devonshire lane.

"But you'll keep it for another; another will be sure to come very soon," said Kate, trying to console.

"Nay, nay, I'll have no other," said the girl. "I'll just keep the dress by; but I'll have no other."

Then the conversation lapsed into a long narrative concerning tender hopes and illusions not broken through until the party assembled before the altar rails. Kate listened, as all women do, to the story of heart-aches and deceptions, and in after years, when all other remembrances of the black country were swept away, the souvenir of this white dress remained.

From Bacup they went to Whitworth, a town in such immediate neighborhood that it might be called a suburb of the former place. There they played in the Co-operative Hall, to an audience consisting of a factory man, two children, and a postman who came in on the free list. This was not encouraging; but they, nevertheless, resolved to try the place again; and next day at dinner-time, as the "hands" were leaving the factories, they distributed some hundreds of bills. Dick said he should never forget it: to watch Pimply Face cutting about, shoving his bills into the women's aprons, was the funniest thing he had ever seen in his life. But their efforts were all in vain. It rained like mad, not a soul came to see them; and, in addition to their other troubles, Whitworth was found to be an awkward place to stop at. Dick and his wife had a room in a pub; Montgomery and Williams had to walk over each evening to sleep at Bacup. One day their landlady spoke of Clayton-le-Moors. A fair, she said, was being held, and

she advised the Constellation Company to try their entertainment there. This was regarded in the light of a sensible suggestion, and after a little reflection, on the top of an omnibus, with their wigs and dresses and make-ups stuck under their legs, the four mummers started for the fair. It was a magnificent autumn morning. The sunlight rolled over the great white sides of the booths, Aunt Sallies were being shied at, the pubs were all open, and a huge, rollicking population, fetid with the fermenting sweat of the factories, were disporting themselves on whisky and fresh air. A fairer prospect of a harvest never buoyed up with hope the spirits of dejected strolling players. The next thing to do was to distribute the handbills, and find a place where they could set up their show. But here lay the difficulty, and, to conduct their search more thoroughly, they separated, after having decided on a rendezvous. In this way the town was thoroughly ransacked; but it was not until Kate, who had gone off on her own accord, learnt from the landlord of a public-house, where she had entered to get a drink, that he had a large concert-room overhead, that there seemed to be slightest chance of the Constellation Company being able to turn the joviality of the factory hands at the fair to any account. Matters seemed now to be looking up, and a very neat little arrangement was entered into with the proprietor of the pub. It was as follows. Four entertainments of ten minutes each were to be given every hour, for each of which the sum of threepence a head was to be charged, twopence to go to the artists, a penny to the landlord, who would, of course, make his "bit" also out of the drink supplied. And what a success they had that day! Not only did the factory hands come in, but they paid their threepences over and over again. Of hearing Dick and Kate sing the "Mulligan Guards" they seemed never to grow tired, and when she called out "Corps," and he touched his cap, and they broke into a dance, the delight of the workpeople knew no bounds. Often they stopped the entertainment to hand up their mugs of beer to the mummers with a "'Ave a soop, mon."

From twelve o'clock in the day until eleven at night

the affair was kept going; Kate, Dick, and Williams dancing and singing in turn, and Montgomery all the while spanking away at the dominoes. It was heavy work, but the coin they took was considerable, and it came in handy, for in the next three towns they did very badly. But at Padiham, a curious accident turned out in the end very luckily for them. There were but five people in the house, one of whom was drunk. This fellow very humorously in the middle of the entertainment declared that he was going to sing a song. He even wanted to appropriate Williams's wig, and when Dick, who was always chucker-out on such occasions, attempted to eject him, he climbed out of reach and lodged himself in one of the windows. From there he proceeded to call to the people in the street, and with such excellent result that that evening they had £18 in the hall.

This, and similar slices of good fortune, kept the Constellation Company rolling from one adventure, from one town to another. Sometimes a wet day came to their assistance; sometimes a dispute between some factory hands and the masters brought them a little money. Their wants were simple; a bed in a pub, and a steak for dinner, was all they asked for. But at last, as winter wore on, ill fortune commenced to follow them very closely and persistently. They had been to four different towns and had not made a ten pound note to divide between the lot of them. In the face of such adversity it was not worth while keeping on, besides Kate's expected confinement rendered it impossible to prolong their little tour much further. For these reasons, one November morning the Constellation Company, hoping they would soon meet again, under more auspicious circumstances, bade each other good-by at the railway station. Williams and Montgomery went to Liverpool, Kate and Dick to make a stay at Rochdale, where they had heard that many companies were coming. The companies came, it is true, but they were, unfortunately, filled up, and Lennox and his wife could not get an engagement in any of them. The little money saved out of their tour enabled them to keep body and soul together for about a month; but in the fifth week,

they found themselves telling the landlady lies, and going through all the classic excuses—expecting a letter every day, by Monday at the very latest, &c. This in the face of Kate's approaching confinement, was a state of things that made even Dick begin to look anxiously round and fear for the safety of the future. Kate, on the contrary, although fretted and wearied, took matters more easily than might have been expected; and the changing of their last ten shillings frightened her less than had the first announcement of the possible breaking up of Morton and Cox's Operatic Company. Bohemianism had achieved in her its last victory; and having lately seen so many of the difficulties of life solving themselves in ways that were inexplicable to her, she had unconsciously grown to think that there was no knot that chance, luck, or fate would not untie. Besides, her big Dick's resources were apparently unlimited; the present weakness of her condition tended to induce her to rely more than ever upon his protection; and in the lassitude of weak hopes, she contented herself with praying occasionally that all would yet come right. But her lover, although he told her nothing of his fears, was not so satisfied. Never before had he been quite so hard pressed. They owed now a week's rent, besides other small debts; all of which, unless they pawned the remainder of their clothes, they were unable to pay. Far better, he said, it would be for them to go to Manchester, leaving their things, to be redeemed some day, as security with the landlady—that is to say, if they failed to get out of the house without being perceived by her. Half-a-crown still remained to them that would pay Kate's railway fare. As regards himself, Dick proposed that he should do the journey on foot; he would be able to walk the distance easily in three hours, and would at eleven o'clock join his wife at an address which he gave her, with many injunctions as to the story that was to be told to the landlady. So, as the clocks were striking seven one cold winter's morning, they stole quietly downstairs, Dick carrying a small portmanteau. On the table of their room a letter was left, explaining that a telegram received over

night called them to Manchester, but that they hoped to be back again in a few days—a week at latest.

This assurance Dick considered would amply satisfy the old dame, and holding the portmanteau on his shoulder with one arm, and supporting Kate with the other, he made his way to the station.

The day had not yet begun to break. A heavy, sluggish night hung over the town. The streets were filled with puddles and flowing mud; and Kate was frequently obliged to stop and rest against the lamp-posts. She complained of feeling very ill, and she walked with much difficulty. In the straggling light of the gas, Dick looked at her pale, pretty features, accentuated by suffering; he felt that he had never known before how dearly he loved her, and the pity for her that filled his heart choked him when he attempted to speak: and his eyes misted with tenderness. To have to leave her now, although only for a few hours, seemed to him brutality that was utterly unbearable. He thought of the old dodge of travelling on the luggage, but fearing that the woman to whose house they were going would not let them in unless they had at least one portmanteau to show, he determined to adhere to the original plan of sending Kate on in front. Although tortured by atrocious imaginings, hiding his fears, he assured her that their troubles would be over once they set foot in Manchester: all he had to do was to go down to the Theatre Royal to get an engagement. So kindly did he speak, that to learn that he loved her seemed to repay her for her sufferings. For some days past she had been subject to violent nauseas and acute pains, and as she bade him good-by out of the railway-carriage window, she had to bend and press herself against it. Dick read from her face what was passing, and he strove to encourage her with a few words of hope. But a cloud of deep melancholy settled upon the cheeks, generally so restful in a happy animality—yet the fat hand lifted the big-brimmed black felt hat, the frizzly curls blew in the cold wind, the train oscillated and then rolled and disappeared round a bend in the line. That was all. What had been done was over, as completely as the splash made by a stone dropped into

a well, and the actor awoke to a feeling that something new had again to be begun.

After descending the steps of the station, he asked to be directed, and bravely he started to walk from Rochdale to Manchester. For a long time his way lay through an interminable street, made by red brick houses with stucco porches; but at length these commenced to divide into cottages;—and, curious characteristic, the pavements were lined with immense flag-stones, set on end and bound together with iron clasps. After many inquiries, he was shown into what he was told was an old Roman road, called "Going over Tindel." In front of him often arose the green mass of a hill dirtied with tillage; on the left stretched a wide valley, at the upper end of which lay Rochdale. From the snow-patched wolds the wind blew bitterly, and into a murky sky the trees that fretted the higher ridges melted like veils of gray lace.

Walking was not Dick's forte. He was out of condition. Each steep incline deprived him of breath. Leaning against a farm gate, his eyes embraced the wild black scenery, and remembrances of the Hanley hills drifted through his thoughts. There were the same rolling wastes, and, as the pieces on a chess-board, the factory chimneys appeared at irregular intevals. But these topographical similarities attracted Dick only so far as they filled his mind with old memories and associations, and his thoughts flowed from the time he had stood with his wife at the top of Market Street to the present hour. He neither praised nor blamed himself. He accepted things as they were without criticism, and they appeared to him like a turgid dream, swollen and bleak as the confused expanse of distance before him. The stupor into which he occasionally fell, endured until a quick thought would strike through the mental gloom that oppressed him, and, relinquishing the farm gate, he would moodily resume his walk through the heavy slosh of the wet roads. As he did so his thoughts knotted themselves into cruel and tortuous shapes. The vision of Kate's pain-stricken face haunted him, and at every step his horror of the danger she ran of being taken ill before arriving in Manchester grew

darker and deeper. Dead as was his imagination to spiritual, it was quick to appreciate all physical suffering. His pity being born of the flesh, concerned itself with the flesh, and with it only, and, panting and blowing, he toiled up hill after hill, yearning to be near her, desiring only the power to relieve and to help. Memories of all he had heard and read of what was a woman's agony under such circumstances came to him in burning flashes, and spurred him on like a jaded horse up the severe roads. Often the intensity of his longing would force him into a run, and then the farm laborers would turn from their work to gaze on this huge creature, who stood on a hill-top wearily wiping his forehead.

In those moments he grew sick of the long staring, rolling landscape, with its thousand sinuosities, its standard trees, its detailed foreground of scrub, hedges, brooks, spanned by small brick bridges, the melting distance, the murky sky, the belching chimneys: he asked himself if it would never end, if it would never define itself into the streets of Manchester. And as he descended each incline his eyes searched for the indication of a town, until at last he saw lines of smoke, factories, and masses of brick on his left, and his heart big with expectation, he hastened towards it. All the markings of the way were looked forward to, the outlying streets were deemed interminable, and so great was his hurry that before he discovered he was in Oldham, he had walked into the middle of the town. His disappointment was bitter and black, and for the moment he felt that, come what would, he could go no farther; his courage was exhausted, it was impossible he could face that bleak mocking landscape again. Besides, he was fainting for want of food. Had he possessed a few pence to treat himself to a glass of beer and a bit of bread and cheese, he thought he would be able to pull himself together and make another effort; but he was utterly destitute. Still he was forced to try again. The thought of Kate burned in his brain. After having inquired the way, with weary and aching feet, he once more trudged manfully on. A fretful suspicion that she might not find the landlady as agreeable as would under the cir-

cumstances be desirable now haunted him. He reasoned with himself as he crossed into the open country, until anxiety became absorbed by fatigue. Of every passer-by did he ask the way, and as he passed the stately villas that heralded the presence of the reeking centre of commerce that lay behind, Dick felt that had there been much further to walk he would have had to beg a lift from one of the wagoners who constantly passed him driving their heavy teams. But he was now in Manchester, another half hour would see him in his wife's arms; and wondering what had happened since their parting, he stared into the shop windows in search of a clock. He had taken longer to do the distance than he had expected. It was now mid-day, in four hours anything might have happened, and when he rang at the door of the lodging-house his heart beat as rapidly as the jangling bell that pealed through the house. The classic maid-of-all-work, begrimed with her pots and pans, answered him, and in reply to his questions declared positively that no one had called that morning, and that she had heard "nothing of no lady."

Had the world suddenly given way beneath him it would not have been to him a more complete annihilation. His brain rocked, and it was only by a violent effort that he could continue his questions. Upon cross examination the maid admitted that she had been out on an errand, and had not seen missus since ten o'clock. It was, therefore, possible that a lady might have called, but as for being in the house, it was impossible, for they were as full as they could hold. On hearing this Dick drew a deep breath of relief, his terror faded; and the view, the street, the doorstep, the maid, assumed their natural appearance, just as if they had been lifted out of a fog.

"And are you certain that a lady might have called about ten or half-past without your having seen her?"

"I was out of a herrant at that time, so I am sure they might, for missus wouldn't mind to tell me if I wasn't to get rooms ready for them."

"And what would your mistress do in the case of not being able to supply a lady with rooms?"

"She would send, I should think, round to Mrs.—— well, I don't remember right the name."

"Do you know the address?"

"I know it is behind the station, one of those streets where—nay—but I don't think I could direct you right."

"Then what shall I do?"

"Missus will be in shortly. If you will take a set in 'all, I can't ask you into any other room, they're all occupied."

There was nothing to do but to accept, and after having asked when the landlady might be expected in, and receiving the inevitable, "Really couldn't say for certain, sir, but I don't think she'll be long," he sat down in a chair. His thoughts were as tired as his body, but a ferocious anxiety preyed upon him and allowed him no rest. Visions of stretchers and hospital doors rose before his eyes, and the high shrieks of a woman in labor echoed in his ears. Weary, footsore as he was, there were times when struck by a sudden thought he would make a movement as if to start from his seat; but instantly remembering his own powerlessness, he would slip back into his attitude of heavy fatigue. In the dining-room the clock ticked, and he listened to the invincible march of the minutes, wondering when the landlady would be back, tortured by the idea that his wife was suffering, dying, and that he was not near to help, to assist, to assuage. He forgot that they were penniless, homeless, all was lost in a boundless pity, and he listened to the footsteps growing sharper as they approached, and duller as they went. At last the small sound of the latchkey was heard in the lock, and Dick started to his feet. It was the landlady.

"Have you seen my wife?"

"Yes, sir," exclaimed the astonished woman; "she was here this morning, all our rooms are let, so I couldn't——"

"Where is she gone to, do you know?"

"Well, sir, I was going to say, she asked me if I could recommend her to some quiet place, and I sent her to Mrs. Hurley's."

"And will you give me Mrs. Hurley's address?"

"Yes sir, certainly; but if I may make so bold, you are

looking very tired, may I offer you a glass of beer? And Mrs. Lennox is looking very bad too, she is."

"I am much obliged, but I have no time, if you would give me the address?"

No sooner were the words spoken than, forgetful of his aching feet Dick rushed away, and dodging the passers-by, he ran until he laid hands on the knocker and bell in question.

"Is Mrs. Lennox staying here?" he asked of the lady who opened the door.

"There was a lady of that name who inquired for rooms here this morning."

"And isn't she here? Why didn't she take the rooms?"

"Well, sir, she said she was expecting to be confined, and I didn't care to have illness in my house."

"You don't mean to tell me that you turned her out? Oh, you atrocious ——! If you were a man——"

Overpowered with rage he stopped for words, and the woman, fearing he would strike her strove to shut the door. But Dick, with his thick leg, prevented her, and at this moment they were joined by the maid, who, speaking over her mistress's shoulder, screamed:

"The lady said she would come round here in a couple o' hours' time to ask for you, and I advised her to try for rooms at No. 28 in the street. You'll find her there."

This was enough for Dick, who, loosing his hold on the door, made off; streets, carriages, passers-by, whirled before his eyes.

"Is Mrs. Lennox here?" he asked, when the door was opened, so roughly that the maid regretted having said yes, when the word had passed her lips.

"On what floor?"

"The first, sir; but you had better let me go up first. Mrs. Lennox is not very well; she's expecting her husband."

"I am her husband."

And on that Dick rushed at the staircase. A few strides brought him on the first landing; but a sudden disappointment seized him—the sitting-room was empty. Thinking instantly of the bedroom, he flung open the door, and there

he saw Kate, rocking herself to and fro, sitting on the edge of the bed. Uttering a faint cry of mingled feelings, she rose to her feet; the expression of weary pain was changed to one of illimitable joy, and Dick locked her in his arms.

"I thought you would never come, and they would take me in nowhere."

"Yes, my darling, I know all about it; I know all."

Kisses he laid gently on the rich black-blue hair and the pale tired face; he felt light hands resting on him; she felt strong arms clasped about her, and each soul seemed to be but the reflection of the other, just as the sky and the sea are when the sun is at its meridian.

Then, as this brief but ineffable moment of spiritual unison faded by gentle transitions, words returned to them, and Kate spoke of all she had suffered. She whispered, fearful lest any one should overhear, the story she had told the landlady, and how she had ordered a big dinner, and everything of the best, so that they might not be suspected of being hard up. Dick approved of these arrangements; but just as he smacked his lips, a foretaste of the leg of mutton in his mouth, Kate uttered a sort of low cry, and, turning pale, pressed her hands to her side. A sharp pain had suddenly run through her, and as quickly died away; but a few minutes after this was succeeded by another, which lasted longer and gripped her more acutely. Supporting her in his arms; largely and tenderly, he helped her across the room and laid her on the bed. There she seemed to experience some relief; but very soon she was again seized by the most acute pangs. It seemed to her that she was bound about with a buckler of iron. Frightened, Dick rang for the landlady. The worthy woman saw at a glance what was happening, and sent him off, weary as he was, to fetch a doctor and the needful assistance.

CHAPTER XXII

THE doctor and nurse arrived almost simultaneously, and bidding Dick, who came running upstairs a moment after, be of good cheer, they passed into sick-room. The mummer took his hat from his head and stood for a moment staring vacantly at the bedroom door, as if striving there to read the secrets of life, birth and death. Then, remembering how tired he was, with a large movement of fatigue he sat down on the sofa. The day was beginning to die, and a gloomy yellow sky filled the room with an oppressive and mournful twilight. To relieve his aching feet Dick had kicked off his shoes, and with his folded arms pressed against his stomach he sat hour after hour, too hungry to sleep, listening to the low moaning that came, as if from some hurt animal, through the chinks of the door. He appeared to be totally forgotten. Voices whispered on the staircase, people passed hurriedly through the sitting-room, but none asked him if he wanted anything; no one even noticed him. As an alien he was ignored in the drama that was being enacted, and when the landlady lighted the gas she uttered a cry of astonishment, as if she had discovered an intruder in the room.

"Oh, lawks! Mr. Lennox, we had forgotten all about you, and you sittin' there so quiet. But your wife is getting on nice, she has just had a cup of beef tea; in about another couple of hours it will be all over."

"Is she suffering much?"

"Well sir, yes, I wouldn't consider it an easy confinement; but I think it will be all right, you will see your wife and child alive and well to-morrow morning."

Dick could not help doubting, unless she came to his assistance with food, the truth of the woman's statement. Although almost starving, he was afraid to call for dinner lest she should ask him for some money in advance, but at that moment a cramp seized him, and turning pale he had

to lean over the table to suppress the moan which rose to his lips.

"What's the matter, sir? You look quite ill," the woman asked.

"Oh, 'twas only a sudden pain," said Dick, making an effort to recover himself. "I have eaten nothing all day—have had no time, you know."

"Then we shall have you laid up as well as your wife, and there's the leg of mutton she ordered stewing away all these hours. I'm afraid you won't be able to eat it?"

Absurd as the question appeared to him, Dick answered adroitly,

"It will do very well, if you will bring it up as soon as you can; I may have to go out."

This was intended as a ruse to deceive the landlady, for so tired was he that had it been to save Kate's life he did not think he would have walked downstairs. He could think of nothing but putting something into his stomach, and hard and dry as the mutton was it seemed to him the most delicious thing he had ever tasted. His pain melted away with the first mouthful, and the glass of beer ran through and warmed his entire system. Down the great throat the victuals disappeared as if by magic, and almost unheeded passed the unceasing cry that seemed now to fill the entire house.

For a moment he would listen pityingly, and then like an animal return to his food. Slice after slice had been cut from the joint, he thought he could finish it, his hunger seemed to grow upon him, and he often longed to take the bone in his hand and pick it with his teeth. But he reasoned with himself; it would not do to let the landlady suspect they had no money, and as he gazed at the last potato, which he was afraid to eat, he considered what he should say in apology for his appetite; but as he sought for a nice phrase, something pleasantly facetious, he remembered the terrible straits he was in for want of money. Money he would have to find to-morrow—where, he could not say, but money he would have to find. There were a thousand things that would have to be paid for—the baby's clothes, the cradle, the—he tried to think of what was generally

wanted under such circumstances, but the cries in the next room which had gradually swelled into shrieks, appalled him. Involuntarily, like a flash, the thought struck him that there might be a funeral to pay for as well as a birth.

Clasping his hands, he moved out on the staircase to see if he could find the landlady; the solitude of the cold sitting-room had grown intolerable. As he was about to call out, the bell tinkled, and the maid came running up. She carried a jug of hot water and flannels in her hand, and pushing past him she declared that she hadn't a moment. Everybody seemed to have something to do but him. Returning, he sat down by the table and listened. The door of the bedroom was ajar. The room was full of a roseate radiance. A fire burned, candles flared on the mantelpiece, a basin stood on the floor, and at times nothing was heard but a long moan, mingling with the murmuring voices of the doctor and nurse. The place seemed like a sanctuary in which some mysterious rite was being performed. But suddenly the silence was broken by shrieks so passionate and acute that all the earlier ones were only remembered as feeble lamentations. Dick raised his big face from his hands, the movement threw back the shock mass of frizzly hair, and in the intensity of his emotion he looked like a lion.

"Was this, then, life?" he asked himself, "or death; and by whose order was a human creature tortured thus cruelly?" The idea of God did not, however, arrest his attention, and his thoughts fixing themselves on the child as on a demon of malignity, he prayed through the mystery of birth for life. What was this new life? What was it to him? Could it not exist without the sacrifice of the old? he asked himself; and for a lucid interval such reflections flowed rapidly and nervously through the actor's heavy mind; but he gradually slipped back into the stupor from which they had raised him, and was not again aroused until after a piercing scream he heard a voice, still attuned to the scream that had startled him, exclaiming:

"Oh, I never will again! Oh, how I hate him—I could kill him! I'll never love him, never no more."

The pealing humanity of the cry touched the fat mummer

through all the years of gross sensuality, through the indigestion of his big dinner, and, struck by the sense of her words, he shuddered, remembering that it was he, not the innocent child, who was the cause of this outrageous suffering. Was it possible, he asked himself, that she would never love him again? He didn't know. Was it possible that he was culpable? Strange notions respecting the origin, the scheme, the design of the universe, flashed in dim chiaro-oscuro through his thoughts, and for a moment he pondered, philosopher like, on the remote causes and the distant finalities of men and things. The scene was at once real, ideal, cynical, and pathetic, a sample slice from the incongruous comedy of life.

In this way an hour full of moans and cries of suffering passed painfully away, and then another shriek scattered Dick's dreams to the winds, and brought him with a shock to earth; a second and a third tortured him with feelings of pity that were delirious in their excess; then a great silence came, and the whole house seemed to sigh with a sense of relief.

"The baby must be born now," he said; and immediately after a little thin cry was heard, and in his heart it was prolonged like a note of gladness, and his thoughts became paternal. He wondered if it were a girl or a boy; he fancied he'd like a girl best. If she were pretty, and had a bit of a voice, he'd be able to push her to the front, whereas with a boy, that was more difficult. Relinquishing his visions at this point, Dick listened to the silence. He did not, without quite knowing why, dare to knock at the door, but the murmur of satisfied voices assured him that all was right. Still it was very odd that they did not come out and announce the result to him. Did he count for nobody? Did they fancy that it was nothing to him if his wife and child were dead or alive? The idea of being thus completely unconsidered in an affair of such deep concern irritated him, and he walked towards the sofa to brood over his wrongs. Should he, or should he not, knock at the door? At last he decided that he should, and, after a timid rap, tried the handle. He was immediately confronted by the nurse.

"It is all right, sir, you shall come in in a moment when the baby is washed."

"Yes, but I want to know how my wife is."

"She is doing very well, sir; you shall see her presently."

The door was then gently but firmly closed, and Dick was kept waiting. Great as was his anxiety to see his wife, now that the terror of losing her was over, the fatigue of the day began to press upon him, and when the nurse called for him to come in, almost collapsing under it, he staggered into the room. Pale and inert, Kate lay amid the sheets, her beautiful black hair making an ink stain on the pillows. She stretched an exhausted hand to him, and looked at him earnestly and affectionately. To both of them their lives seemed completed.

"Oh, my darling, my darling!" he murmured; and his heart melted with happiness at the faint pressure of fingers which he held within his. The nurse standing by him held something red wrapped up in flannels. He scarcely noticed it until he heard Kate say:

"It is a little girl. Kiss it, dear."

Awkwardly he touched with his lips the tiny whining mass of flesh the nurse held forward, feeling, without knowing why, ashamed of himself.

"Hearing that madam was taken all unexpected, I brought these flannels with me," said the large woman with the long-tailed cap; "but to-morrow I can recommend you, if you like, sir, to a shop where you can get everything required."

This speech brought Dick with a cruel jerk to the brink of the atrocious situation in which he had so unexpectedly found himself. To-morrow he would have to find money, and a great deal too. How he was going to do it he did not know, but money would have to be found.

"Yes, yes; to-morrow I'll see to all that," he said, awakening from his lethargy, like a jaded horse touched in some new place by the spur, "but now I'm so tired I can scarcely speak."

"That's so," said the landlady. "These walking tours is dreadful. He's been over from Rochdale to-day, not counting the runnin' about he did after his wife. You

know they refused to take her in at number fifteen. But, sir, I don't well know how we shall manage. I don't see how I am to offer you a bed. The best I can do for you is to make you up something on the sofa in the parlor."

"Oh, the sofa will do very well. I think I could sleep on the tiles; so good-night dear," he said as he leaned and kissed his wife; "I'm sorry to leave you so soon."

"It isn't a bit too soon," said the doctor. "She must lie still and not talk."

On this Dick was led away. The nurse and doctor consulted by the bed where the woman would lie for days, too weak even to dream, while the man went off into the Manchester crowd to search for food. Beyond the bare idea of "going down to see what they were doing at the theatres," he had no plans. The scavenger dog that prowls about the gutter in search of offal could not have less. But he felt sure that something would turn up; he was certain to meet someone to whom he could sell a piano or for whom he could build a theatre. He never made plans. There was no use in making plans; they were always upset by an accident. Far better, he thought, to trust to the inspiration of the moment; and when he awoke in the morning, heavy with sleep, he felt no trepidation, no fear beyond that of how he should get his sore feet into his shoes. It was only with a series of groans and curses that he succeeded in doing this, and the limps by which he proceeded down the street were painful to watch. At the stage-door of the Theatre Royal a conciliatory tone of voice was mechanically assumed as he asked the porter if Mr. Jackson was in. But before the official could answer, Dick caught sight of Mr. Jackson coming along the passage.

"How do you do, old man? Haven't seen you for a long time."

"What you, Dick, in Manchester? Come and have a drink, old man. Very glad to see you. Stopping long here?"

"Well, I'm not quite decided. My wife was confined, you know, last night."

"What! you a father, Dick?"

Leering, Mr. Jackson poked him in the ribs, and com-

menced a list of anecdotes. To these Dick had to listen, and, in the hopes of catching his friend in an unwary moment of good-humor, he laughed heartily at all the best points. But digressive as conversation is in which women are concerned, sooner or later a reference is made to the cost and the worth, and at last Mr. Jackson was incautious enough to say:

"Very expensive those affairs are, to be sure."

This was the chance that Dick was waiting for, and immediately buttonholing his friend he said:

"You are quite right, they are; and to tell you the truth, old man, I'm in the most devilish awkward position I ever was in my life. You heard about the breaking up of Morton and Cox's company? Well, that left me stranded."

At the first words gayety disappeared from Mr. Jackson's face, and during Dick's narrative of the tour in Lancashire he made many ineffectual wriggles to get away. Judging from these well-known indications, that to borrow money might be attended with failure, Dick, after a pathetic description of his poverty, concluded with:

"So now, my dear fellow, you must find something for me to do. It does not matter what—something temporary until I can find something better, you know."

It was difficult to resist this appeal, and after a moment's reflection Mr. Jackson said:—

"Well, you know we're all made up here. There's a small part in the new drama to be produced next week, but I wouldn't like to offer it as it is, but I might get the author to write it up."

"It will do first-rate. I'm sure to be able to make something of it. What's the screw?"

"That's just the point. We can't afford to pay much for it; our salary list is too big as it is."

"What did you intend giving for it?"

"Well, we meant to give it to a super, but for you I can have it written up. What do you say to two-ten?"

Dick thought it would be judicious to pause, and after a short silence he said:—

"I've had, as you know, bigger things to do; but I'm awfully obliged to you, old pal. You are doing me a good

turn that I sha'n't forget: we can consider the matter as settled."

This was a stroke of luck, and Dick congratulated himself warmly, until he remembered that £2 10s. at the end of next week did not put a farthing into his present pocket. Money he would have to find that day, how he did not know. He called upon everybody he had ever heard of; he visited all the theatres and ball-rooms, drank interminable drinks, listened to endless stories, and when questioned as to what he was doing himself, grew delightfully mendacious, and, upon the slight basis of his engagement for the new drama at the Royal, constructed a fabulous scheme for the production of new pieces. In this way the afternoon went by, and he was beginning to give up hopes of turning over any money that day, when he met a dramatic author. After the usual salutations—"How do you do, old boy? How's business?" &c.—had been exchanged, the young man said:—

"Had a bit of luck; just now sold my piece; you know the drama I read you, the one in which the mother saves her child from the burning house?"

"How much did you get?"

"Seventy-five pound down, and two pounds a night."

At the idea of so much money Dick's eyes glistened, and he immediately proceeded to unfold a scheme he had been meditating for some time back for the building of a new theatre. The author listened attentively, and after having dangled about the lamp-posts for half an hour, they mutually agreed to eat a bit of dinner together and afterwards go home and read another new piece that was, so said the fortunate author, a clinker. No better excuse than his wife's confinement could be found for fixing the rendezvous at the young man's lodging, and in the enthusiasm which the reading of the acts engendered, it was easy for Dick to ask for, and difficult for his friend to refuse, a cheek for £15.

CHAPTER XXIII

IN about a week Kate was sufficiently restored to sit up in bed. Her very weakness and lassitude were a source of happiness; for, after long months of turmoil and racket, it was sweet to lie in the lucid dreaminess of the covertures, and suffer her thoughts to grow out of unconsciousness or sink back into it without an effort. Then from these twilight trances flowed imperceptibly another period, when with coming strength awoke in her a feverish love for the little baby-girl who lay sleeping by her side. For hours in the reposing obscurity of the drawn curtains mother and child would remain hushed in one long warm embrace. To see, to feel, this little life moving against her side was enough. She looked not into the future nor thought of what fate the years held in store for her daughter, but lost in emotive contemplation, watched the blind movements of hands and the vague staring blue eyes, content. This puling pulp, in which there was life that was hers, developed in her unimaginable yearnings, and she often trembled for pride in being the instrument through which was worked so much mystery. Knowing nothing of children, to talk of the dark dawn of creation, and of the day sweet with maternal love that lay beyond, was to Kate a source of infinite joy. To hear the large, hobbling woman tell of the different babies she had successfully started that year on their worldly pilgrimage, seemed never to weary Kate. She interested herself in each special case, and when the nurse told her she must talk no more she lay back, held as if by a sort of secret affinity, to dream of the great boy with the black eyes who had so nearly been the death of his little flaxen-haired mother.

She felt great interest in this infant, who, if he went on growing at the present rate, it was prophesied would be in twenty years' time the biggest man in Manchester. But on

questioning the nurse, it was admitted that all the children were not so strong and healthy. Indeed, it was only last week that a little baby she had brought into the world perfectly safely had died within a few days of its birth, for no cause that anyone could discover. It had pined away just like a flower. The tears rolled down Kate's cheeks as she listened, and she pressed her own against her breast and insisted on nursing it, although expressly forbidden to do so by the doctor.

These days were the best of her life. She felt more at peace with the world, she placed more confidence in her husband than she had ever done before; and when he came in of an afternoon and sat by her side and talked of herself and of their little baby, softened in all the intimate fibres of her sex, she laid her hand in his, and sighed for sheer joy. The purpose of her life seemed now to show a definite sign of accomplishment.

The only drawback to their happiness was their poverty. The fifteen pounds of borrowed money had gone through their hands like water, and had Dick not been fortunate enough to make another "tenner" by looking after a piece given at a morning performance, they would never have been able to manage. What with the doctor's bill, the nurse's wages, the baby's clothes, they were forever breaking into their last sovereign. Dick spoke of their difficulties as little as possible. He would not have mentioned them to her had he not felt that he had exhausted all his sources of getting money, and that there was no prospect of their being able to pull through unless Kate were shortly able to accept an engagement. He often spoke to her on the subject, but although she was now up and apparently well, she always answered with a "Yes, dear, I hope I shall be well enough to go to work again soon." She would not, nevertheless, fix a day, or even allow Dick to speak to the managers about her. The idea seemed distasteful, and she would invent all sorts of plausible excuses. Who was there to mind the baby? If they had nurse back again it would cost them a pound a week, pretty near; and then there was the chance of her knocking herself up, and that would be far worse than the loss of a miserable three pounds a week

she should get for playing some trumpery little part. Besides, she did not wish to let herself down in the profession. She had been playing leading parts, and it would not do to accept the first thing that she could get.

A month passed away, and Kate grew more than ever averse to all proposals to go back to work. When Dick tried to persuade her to keep her name before the public, she answered that she had not yet recovered from her confinement—that she had worked, as it was, too much last year, that she wanted a rest. Never since she had left Hanley had they been so long stationary, and in the pause fragments of the wreck of her old life commenced to float up through the new to the surface. She began to look after the housekeeping, and her fingers seemed to itch for the needle and thread. She insisted on mending Dick's clothes, and she made hoods and shoes for the baby. Her manner of thought, of speech, was marked everywhere with traces of a curious return to her first life. She no longer played in opera bouffe, but in domestic drama; and although the reality of her hearth was little more than that of a stage property, still when she sat by her fireside reading a novel, you saw reflected in Mrs. Lennox a curious likeness of the Mrs. Ede of former days. Even her taste for fiction was reproduced. While she was touring about the country she had unconsciously given up reading; once she had bought a copy of the *Family Herald*, hoping that it would help her to kill an hour or so in the train, but it had failed to fix her attention. The weak, airy sentimentality, that used to divert her when she was with Ralph, had seemed to her when she was with Dick, unreal, uninteresting. Her own life was then a strange romance, and so much more glaring was it in its contrasts, so infinitely deeper in its humanity, that the frail girls of the story-book could not satisfy her mind in the hot days of desire; but now in the laxity of its evening, when the turmoil of a noisy afternoon was remembered only like the murmur of a low tide rippling under the sunset, the grace, the peace, the goodness of the heroes and heroines, who lived unsullied by any too dark stain of humanity in a sweetly regulated world of convention, enraptured and fascinated her.

She wondered why she had neglected her books so long. And towards the end of these stories there were allusions to mothers. She was a mother now, and in the drift of her dreams could see a blissful future made of children's smiles; she heard their glad laughter ringing down the procession of the years, felt their soft cheeks against hers, their chubby warm bodies upon her knees; and when she raised her eyes, a tear of joy fell upon the page, and then in the effusion of these sensations she would take her little girl, that she had till now forgotten, and press it almost wildly against her breast.

It was a small weakly little thing, out of whose white wax complexion shone the violet blue eyes it had inherited from its father. And before leaving, the nurse had given Kate many directions about the baby. It was to have its bath in the morning, to be kept thoroughly clean; it was to be given its bottle when it cried. These instructions Kate did, in a sort of way, fulfill, but not being used to children she did not readily divine the baby's wants, and she often put either too much or too little water in the feeding bottle. She was devoted to her child, but the attention she gave it was unpractical and unsustained.

The christening had awakened in her many forgotten emotions, and now that she was an honest married woman, she did not see why she should not resume her old church-going ways. The story she was reading was full of allusions to the vanity of this world and the durability of the next; and thus encouraged, Kate bought a Bible and spent the long evenings when Dick was at the theatre with it on her knees. It made her feel she was doing something, and certain passages were for her so filled with memories that in reading them she felt her being evaporate into a cloud of happiness.

Her feet on the fender, penetrated with the dreamy warmth of the fire, she abandoned herself to the seduction of her reveries. Everything conspired against her. Being still very weak the doctor had ordered her to keep up her strength with stimulants; a tablespoonful of brandy and water taken now and then was what was required. This was the ordinance, but the drinks in the dressing-rooms

had taught her the comforts of such medicines, and during the day several glasses were consumed. Without getting absolutely drunk, she rapidly sank into sensations of numbness, in which all distinctions were blurred, and thoughts trickled and slipped away like the soothing singing of a brook. It was like an amorous tickling, and as her dreams balanced between a tender declaration of love and the austere language of the Testament, the crying of the sick child was unheeded.

Once Kate did not hear it for hours; she did not know she had forgotten to warm its milk, and that the poor little thing was shivering with cold pain. At last she awoke, and going over to the cot tried to collect her drink-laden thoughts. The little legs were drawn up, the face was like ivory, and a long thin wail issued from the colorless lips. Alarmed, Kate called for the landlady, who, after feeling the bottle advised that the milk should be warmed. When this was done the child drank a little and appeared relieved.

Shortly after a bell was heard ringing, and the landlady said:—

"I think it's your husband, ma'am."

It was usual for Dick, when he came in at night, to tell what Kate termed "the news." It amused her to hear what had been done at the theatre, what fresh companies had come to town. On this occasion it surprised him that she took so little interest in the conversation, and after hazarding a few remarks he said:

"But what's the matter, dear, aren't you well?"

"Oh, yes, I am quite well," Kate answered stolidly.

"Well, what's the matter; you don't speak?"

"I'm tired, that's all."

"And how's the baby?"

"I think she's asleep; don't wake her."

Dick went over, nevertheless, and holding a candle in one hand he looked long and anxiously at his child.

"I'm afraid the little thing is not well, she's fidgetting, and is as restless as possible."

"I wish you would leave her alone; if she awakes, it is

I who will have the trouble of it, not you. I have been minding her all day. It's very unkind of you."

Dick looked at his wife astonished. He at first fancied he must be mistaken, and said nothing; but as she continued to speak, the evidences of drink became so unmistakable that he said, trying not to offend her:—

"I am afraid that you have been drinking a little too much of the brandy the doctor ordered you."

At this accusation, Kate drew herself up and angrily denied having touched a drop of anything that day.

"How dare you accuse me of being drunk? you ought to respect me more."

"Drunk, Kate? I never said you were drunk, but I thought you might have taken an overdose."

"I suppose you'll believe me when I tell you that I have not had a teaspoonful of anything."

"Of course I believe you, dear," said Dick, who could not credit his ears. He did not think that Kate was capable of telling such a deliberate lie, but seeing that there was no use in discussing the subject at the present time, and being fearfully tired, he suggested getting to bed. Kate made no objection, and she took off her things as steadily as she could. To unlace her stays was difficult, but when Dick offered to assist her she grew cross.

"Do let me alone, let me alone," she said, tearing furiously at the strings.

Without answering, Dick kicked off his shoes; and this was the excuse for another outburst.

"How can you be so unkind? I don't know really what I have done to you, that you should try to wake up that poor sick child."

"I assure you, my dear, I couldn't help it, the shoe slipped off unexpectedly."

Feeling very miserable and unhappy, as if the whole world had set its face against her, Kate wept silently. At first Dick tried to console her, but seeing soon that this was hopeless, he turned his face to the wall and went to sleep.

For a long time she sobbed amid the covertures. There being no blinds, the window behind her was a square of deep blue, and the room, into whose depths she could not choose

but look, had in this glamour an uncertain and tomb-like appearance, and each recess seemed full of strange terrors. At the foot of the bed stood the cradle, and she could just distinguish the baby's face upon the lugubrious pallor of the little pillow. Kate watched, and her husband's breathing irritated her. At last a low wailing cry broke the heavy stillness, and she felt certain she could see the baby moving. "It wants its bottle," she said to herself; but for some time she could not make up her mind to get up. But as the crying continued, pity mastered her fear, and filled with all kinds of maternal solicitudes, she took the poor ailing thing out of its cot and rocked it in her arms. For a long half hour she walked up and down the room, soothing and kissing it. Should she lose it she thought she should go mad, and every feminine fibre in her nature quivered with pain at the thought. But there was no danger of that. Had not the landlady told her that it would be all right in a day or two, that she must not be afraid—infants were never very well. This time, though, she took care to warm the milk; it was no use; she might cram the teat as much as she liked into its mouth, but it would not suck. It seemed as if it would do nothing but wail. To listen to it was most distressing, but at length, as if tired out, it sank to sleep, and with an uneasy heart Kate put it back into its cot. There she sat watching, until a cold piercing shiver ran through her and forced her to remember her imprudence. It was a winter's night, and she thought of what would happen if she too were taken ill. Under such circumstances it was impossible for her not to think of the brandy, and taking the bottle out of a chest of drawers where she had hidden it under some clothes, she poured herself out a large glass. It was the first time she had drunk the spirit neat, and it ran through her, diffusing instantly a delightful and grateful warmth. So satisfied was she with its effect, that after a few moments' hesitation, she drew the cradle close up to the bed, where she could see it the first thing in the morning, and went back to the brandy. She drank the second glass slowly, leaning her arms upon the chest of drawers as she might upon a bar counter. She thought of her child and husband, of how good she intended to be to them,

until ideas became broken and slipped from her, and she staggered back to bed. Then sleep fell crushingly upon her, and amid the shadows of the heavily-heaped blankets the prolonged breathing of the sleepers reverberated through the stillness of the room. But in the twilight, that was becoming gradually clearer, the baby still slept: the moon was beginning to touch with gold the corner of a distant chimney, and soon after a long white ray entered and laid a blanching finger upon the trailing fold of the cradle coverlet. Then, as if awakened by an unearthly presence, the infant uttered a low thin wail; but only the deep snores of the parents made answer, and in the transparent obscurity the little face was twitched with suffering, and one tiny hand raised its dying pallor to heaven.

Above the dark roof the moon had now become a crescent, and as an angel stealing and leaning forward, a white ray kissed with cold supernatural kisses the cheeks of the lonely child,—and instantly, as if in fear, the blue staring eyes were opened, the little legs were drawn up to the very chest, the weak wail ceased and the convulsions began. Would father or mother awake to soothe the pitiful struggle? No, the shivering little limbs stirred only to the hideous accompaniment of the drunken woman's snores; and even as heedless, majestic in naked golden glory, the moon swam up through the azure peace of the skies, until brought face to face with the child.

Then, in a strange and luminous pause, a green presence took possession of the whole room, including every detail in its mysterious embrace. The meanest objects became weird and fearsome; form and sound were transfigured. Demon-like, the brandy bottle stood on the chest of drawers, and the huddled group in the dusky bed seemed as a vile world snoring, equally indifferent to life and to death. Yet for a moment there was hope, for, as if subdued by the magnetism of an unearthly power, the convulsions grew less, and a sweet calm came over the cradle. The respite, how brief it was! Soon the little blankets were cast aside, the legs twisted on to the chest, and the eyes blinked convulsively. But no smile of joy, nor tear of grief, changed the mild cruelty of the amber-colored witch at the window:

softly as a drinking snake, she drank of this young life. Thou shalt be mine and mine only, she seemed to say; and in the devouring gleams the struggle was continued. Out of the flower-like skin black stains grew; all the soft roundnesses fell into distortions; chubby knees were wrenched to and fro, muscles seemed to be torn and the bones beneath to be broken violently: as in the Laocoon, every movement spoke of pain.

So, for an unappreciable space of time, the white rays glorified the poetic agony; and then the little wan body lay still in a flood of passionless light. Not a star watched the bird-like remains: only the moon knew of the moon's tragedy; and after lingering an hour, the pale aureole moved up the sky, leaving the child to sleep in darkness forever.

CHAPTER XXIV

IT had been raining all night, and it was still raining, and the mud flowed. The sky, a dead gray, was shot with the smoke of Manchester, and a faint odor of cinders hovered about the humid atmosphere. The perspectives of the streets were veiled with blue vapor, through which were seen the balancing backs of two cabmen who, perched high above the splashing wheels, leaned to exchange a remark as they passed. Kate, sobbing spasmodically, allowed her dress to trail frequently in the dirt. The mutes had turned up the ends of their trousers, but, at every step they sent the gutter over their knees and the fringes of the pall. Of the many sad things in this world a child's funeral is perhaps the saddest. In a fleeting instant we see love, beauty, happiness, all of which we think in one dream-hour it would have attained, and we mourn the darkness, ashes, and worms that have overtaken it. Vain, perhaps, are these visions; it would have gained only what we ourselves have gained; but still it seems cruel to have been denied a part in the battle. Thus we dream for a moment, and then the little cortége passes on, scarcely noticed, untalked of, uncared for. A dozen people are the most that attend; there are no horses, no plumes. A man in front, another behind, carry what would be mistaken, were it not for its black dress, for a hand barrow. There is not much grief, only a few mother's tears, that is all.

And little Kate's burial differed only from the hundred other baby funerals we have seen in our English streets in this, that it passed even more unnoticed than is usual in such cases. The Lennoxes lived in an unfrequented part of the town not far from the cemetery, and soon the melancholy shops of statuaries, the pallor of the headstones with dates written in indelible black, the crosses of consolation, and the kneeling angels were caught sight

of. One of these, a beautiful girl with large wings, bent right over her back, especially took the mother's fancy. After examining it, and considering if there was a chance of her ever having enough money to buy it, she said:

"Oh, Dick, what a pity it is that we can't put a beautiful monument like one of those over the poor little thing's grave."

"Yes, isn't it? But if she had lived I think she'd have grown into a pretty girl. She was very like you, dear."

He had been offered an engagement for Kate to play the part of the Countess in *Olivette*, and had accepted it, hoping in the meanwhile to be able to persuade her to take it. It was rather hard to ask her to play the day after the funeral, but there was no help for it. The company would arrive in town to-morrow, and Dick thought it would be a pity to let the chance slip. He had not, however, yet dared to speak to her about it. Since her child's death she had had some terrible attacks of hysterical grief. She had refused either to eat or drink, and, uttering low wailing cries, had walked about her room for one whole day and night. Dick and the landlady had in turn tried to console her, but, with wild movements of arms, she had had either buried her face in the pillows or frantically clasped the little dead thing to her breast. But there was a want of naturalness in this sorrow. It was too vehement, and it came too much in jerks to be considered a spontaneous expression of true grief. It was not sustained, there were times when she forgot herself, and relapsed into indifference. And yet she was perfectly sincere. Knowing what a mother should feel she strove to force those feelings upon herself, but the truest sentiment in her heart was hatred of herself for having got drunk and neglected her child. It seemed to her that she must tear and beat herself for what she had done. She thought herself vile and abominable, but of the sweet illimitable love of the mother, she only heard a faint echo in her heart. This blank in her affections was partly inborn, partly the result of later circumstances. She had met Dick in her seven-and-twentieth year, when the sap of her slowly-developing nature was rising to its highest point,

when it was burning and forcing to blossom the fancies and passions of a dreamy youth. A few more years would have killed those desires, as the October winds the flowers, and Kate would have lived and died an honest workwoman. But Dick had passed in time for the harvesting, and the flower had fallen into his hands. He had absorbed her heart and drained it of all the love it could feel for living thing—the febrile, emotional, dissolute life she had since led had worn out her lymphatic temperament, and to her existence was now no more than a nervous erethism; and the gentle imagination had become morose, cynical, and dissatisfied.

We have, therefore, arrived at the period of decadence of Kate's character.

Her want of motherly instincts, and her forced hysterical grief, were owing to the above-named causes; and, as the funeral approached the cemetery her sobbing was so boisterous that one of the mutes looked round.

"Oh, Dick," she said, "to think they'll put her down into the ground, and that we shall perhaps never even see her grave again. We may be a hundred miles from here to-morrow, or after."

Dick, who had had credit of the undertaker, looked around uneasily. Seeing, however, that Kate had not been overheard, he said,

"Poor little thing. It is sad to lose her, isn't it? I should like to have seen her grow up."

Never did anything seem so utterly lost to Kate as her child soon would be. The multitude of graves was appalling. Out of the soaking earth, up to the wet gray sky, the headstones lifted their countless faces. They extended in profusion over a level plain, and so thick were they that a child would not be able to find its way out of the labyrinth. The conventional yew trees stood black as ink by the spikes of the encircling railing, and the big, white-painted backs of the houses, where the living lived, grew yellow upon a dim background of murky sky.

The coffin was first deposited in the middle of a vault-like church. The mutes remained outside in the porch, and Dick fidgeted, feeling ill at ease amid the great barren

benches. He twisted the brim of his big hat nervously, troubled by the service which the parson in a white flowing surplice read from the reading-desk. Kate, on the contrary, appeared much consoled, and she mumbled so many prayers that, involuntarily, Dick began to consider the time it would take to learn a part of equal length. The little brown box remained all the while like a piece of lost luggage, lonely in the grayness of this station-house-looking church; and when the mutes came to claim it Kate burst again into tears. This reminded the parson that he was there to console, and, in soft and unctuous words, he assured the weeping mother that her child had only been removed to a better and brighter world, and that we must all submit to the will of God. In the porch, however, his attention was distracted, and looking anxiously at the dirty drift of clouds that threatened another downpour, he talked confidentially with the sexton, who had come to show them the way. "A little more of this," he thought, "and others will be doing for me what I am now doing for others."

But there being no help for it, with the white surplice blowing, he followed the procession through the interminable tombstones. It seemed a mystery how place for the little grave had been found, and amid much indifference, the service was continued. Dick could not keep his attention fixed, and not a sob was heard until the parson sprinkled earth upon the coffin and the ropes were brutally withdrawn. This last "situation" in the comedy of life cut the mother's heart, but she was now worn out with grief, and in silence threw her flowers into the narrow opening. Dick said nothing, but it made him despair to see her scrambling over the heaps of clay, and it seemed to him pretty well impossible that she would ever be able to play the Countess in *Olivette* on the morrow. She was so fearfully haggard and worn that he doubted if any amount of rouge would make her look the part. This was a great pity. He would have done anything for his little girl while she was alive, but now that she was dead—. Besides, after all, she was only a baby. For some time past this idea had occurred to him as an excellent argu-

ment to convince Kate that there was really no reason why she should not go to the rehearsal on the following morning. If he had not yet spoken in this way it was only because he was afraid that she would round on him, and call him a heartless beast. Lacking moral courage, he would do anything to evade a sulky look; and now, when the funeral was over, and they were walking home wet, sorrowful, and tired, it was curious to watch how he gave his arm to Kate, and the timidity with which he introduced his subject. At first he only spoke of himself, and his hopes of being able to obtain a better part and a higher salary in the new drama. Mention to a mummer who is lying on his death-bed that a new piece is going to be produced, and he will not be able to resist asking a question or two about it; and Kate, weary as she was, at once pricked up her ears and said—

"Oh, they are going to do a new piece! You didn't tell me of that before."

"It was only decided last night," replied Dick.

The spell was now broken, and when they got home and had dinner the conversation was resumed in a strain that, after the mournful tones of the last few days, might be considered as being almost jovial. Dick felt as if a big weight had been lifted from his mind, and the thought again occurred to him, What was the good of making such a fuss over a baby that was only three weeks old? Kate, too, seemed to be awakening to the conviction that there was no use in grieving for ever. The state of torpor she had been living in—for to stifle remorse she had been drinking heavily on the quiet—now began to wear off, and her brain to uncloud itself; and Dick, surprised at the transformation, could not help exclaiming—

"That's right, Kate; cheer up, old girl. A baby three weeks old isn't the same as a grown person."

"I know it isn't, but if you only knew—I'm afraid I neglected the poor little thing."

"Nonsense," replied Dick, who, having an eye constantly on the main chance, wished to avoid any fresh outburst of grief, "you looked after it very well indeed; besides, you'll have another," he added with a smile.

"I want no other," replied Kate, vexed at being misunderstood, and yet afraid to explain herself more thoroughly.

The conversation then came to a pause, and both sought for words to break a long and irritating silence; at last Dick said:

"I wish there was a part for you in the new piece."

"Yes, so do I. I haven't been doing anything for a long while now."

Thus encouraged, Dick told Kate that in the so-and-so company the part of the Countess might be had for the asking.

"Only they play to-morrow night."

"Oh, to-morrow night! It would be dreadful to act so soon after my poor baby's death, wouldn't it?"

"I can't see why. We shall be as sorry for it in a week's time as now, and yet one must get to work some time or other."

Dick considered this a very telling argument, and, not wishing to spoil its effect, he remained silent, so as to give Kate time to digest the truth of what he had said.

The next steps towards arriving at a decision were easily made. Dick pleaded their poverty, told of his indebtedness to friends, explained that so good a chance might not occur again, and expatiated on the dangers that artists ran of being let drop out if they did not keep their names before the public. Kate listened very amiably to these arguments; she whined a bit when pressed for an answer, but next morning, when Dick admitted that he had compromised himself considerably in the matter, she consented to play the part, and they went down to rehearsal. The manager was delighted with her appearance. He told her that the photo that Dick had forwarded did not do her justice; and, handing her the scrip, he said:

"Now you must make your entrance from this side."

"What's the cue?"

"Here it is. I think I shall now beat a retreat in the direction of home."

"Ah! I see."

And, striving to decipher the MS., Kate walked towards

the middle of the stage. "I haven't seen the Duke for twenty-four hours, and that means misery."

"You'll get a laugh for that if you'll turn up your eyes a bit," said Dick. Then, turning to the manager he murmured, "I wish you had seen her as Clairette. The notices were immense. But I must be off now to my own show."

This engagement relieved the Lennoxes for the time being of their embarrassments. During the last month a good many debts had been contracted, the payment of which could not be avoided; but with Kate's four and Dick's two ten a week, doctor, nurse, landlady, and undertaker were eventually settled with. Their lives were now working with clock-like exactitude. At four they dined, at six bade each other good-by, and repaired to their respective theatres. Dick was playing in drama, Kate in opera-bouffe; and something before a quarter to eleven she expected him to meet her at the stage-door of the Prince's. On this point she was very particular, and if he were a few moments late she questioned him minutely as to where he had been, what he had been doing.

One day she happened to catch him talking at the corner of the street with a lady, whom she recognized as belonging to the same theatre as he did. At the time the fact did not strike her very forcibly, but gradually, from words heard here and there, which, through a slow process, were assimilated and twisted in her excited brain, the strangest conclusions were arrived at; and the dreadful jealousies and suspicions which her marriage had appeased returned, and tortured her night and day with a cruel ferocity. At first the approach of pain was manifested by a nervous anxiety for her husband's presence. She seemed dissatisfied and restless when he was not with her, and after breakfast in the mornings, when he took up his hat to go out, she would beg of him to stay, and find fault with him for leaving her. He reasoned with her very softly and kindly, insisted, and assured her that he had the most important engagements. On one occasion it was a man who had given him an appointment in order to speak with him concerning a new theatre, of which he was to have

the entire management; another time it was a man who was writing a drama, and wanted a collaborator to put the stage construction right; and as these *séances* of collaboration occupied both morning and afternoon, Kate, until four o'clock, was thrown entirely on her own resources. The first two or three novels she had read during her convalescence had amused her, but they all now seemed one so much like the other that they ended by boring her; and, too excited to be able to fix her attention, she often read without understanding what she was reading. Her mind was a chaos of conflicting emotions. On one side the memory of her baby's death preyed upon her; she still could not help thinking that it was owing to her neglect that it had died. On the other, the thought that her husband was playing her false goaded her to madness. Sometimes she attempted to follow him, but this only resulted in failure, and she returned home after a fruitless chase more dejected than ever. "Ah! if the baby had not died, there would have been something to live for," she murmured to herself a thousand times during the day, until at last her burden of remorse grew quite unbearable, and she thought of the brandy the doctor had ordered her. Since her engagement to play the Countess she had forgotten it, but now a strange desire seized her as suddenly as if she had been stung by a snake. There was only a little left in the bottle, but that little cheered and restored her even more than she had expected. Her thoughts came to her more fluently, she ate a better dinner, and acted joyously that night at the theatre. "There is no doubt," she said to herself, "the doctor was right. What I want is a little stimulant." Of the truth of this she was more than ever convinced when next morning she found herself again suffering from the usual melancholy and dulness of spirits. The very sight of breakfast disgusted her, and when Dick left she wandered about the room, unable to interest herself in anything. There was a yearning in her throat for the tingling sensation that brandy would bring, and she longed for yesterday's lightness of conscience. But there was no liquor in the house, not even a glass of sherry. What was to be done? Kate hesitated for some

time before applying to the landlady. What would the woman think? Such people were always too ready to put a wrong interpretation upon everything. Still, Mrs. Clarke knew that the doctor had ordered her to take a little brandy when she felt weak. Resolving, however, not to put herself into anybody's power she determined to wait until dinner-time. Half an hour of misery passed, and then, excited to the last degree by the craving for drink, she remembered that it would be very foolish to risk her health for the sake of a prejudice. To obey the doctor's orders was her first duty. This reflection was infinitely consoling; it relieved her mind at once of much uncertainty, and, ringing the bell, she prepared her little speech.

"Oh! Mrs. Clarke, I'm sorry to trouble you, but—I'm feeling so weak this morning—and, if you remember, the doctor ordered me to take a little brandy when I felt I wanted it. Do you happen to have any in the house?"

"No, ma'am, I haven't, but I can send out for it in a minute. And you do look as if you wanted something to pick you up."

"Yes," said Kate, throwing as much weakness as she could into her voice, "somehow I have never felt the same since my confinement."

"Ah! I know well how it pulls one down. If you only knew how I suffered with my third baby!"

"I can well imagine it."

The conversation then came to a pause, and Mrs. Clarke, not seeing her way to any further family confidences, said:

"What shall I send for, ma'am—half a pint? The grocer round the corner keeps some very nice brandy."

"Yes, that will do," said Kate, seeing an unending perspective of drinks in half a pint.

"Shall I put that down in the bill, or will you give me the money now, ma'am?"

This was very awkward, for Kate suddenly remembered that she had this week given over her salary to Dick, without keeping anything out of it. However, there was no help for it now, and putting as bold a face on it as she could, she told Mrs. Clarke to book it. What did it matter

whether Dick saw it or not. Had not the doctor told her she required a little stimulant?

Henceforth brandy drinking became an established part of Kate's morning hours. Even before Dick was out of bed she would invent a pretext for stealing into the next room so that she might have a nip on the sly before breakfast. The bottle, and a packet of sweetstuff to take the smell out of her mouth, were kept behind a large oleograph representing Swiss scenery. The fear that Dick might pop out upon her at any moment often nearly caused her to spill the liquor over the place: but existence was impossible without drink. She couldn't eat, and she felt she was bound to get rid of the miserable moods of mind to which she woke. Before eleven o'clock Dick was out of the house, and this left Kate four hours of lonely idleness staring her blankly in the face. Sometimes she practised a little music, but it wearied her. She had courage now for nothing, and the only thing that killed the dreariness that ached in heart and head was brandy-and-water. Many half-pint bottles had succeeded the first, and, ashamed to admit her secret drinking, she now regularly paid the landlady out of her own money. When funds were low, a little bill was run up, and this was produced and talked over when the two women were having a glass together of a morning. To pay these debts Kate had to resort to the most abject lying. All kinds of excuses had to be concocted. Her first idea was to tell Dick she intended to continue her music lessons. He would be sure, she thought, never to ask her a question on the subject; but Dick, who was still terribly hard up, begged of her to wait until they were better off before incurring new expenses. Annoyed, she fell back on the subject of clothes, and when he asked her if she could not manage to go on with what she had for a bit, it astonished him to see the little mad rage into which she instantly fell. Was it not her own money, had she not earned it, and was he going to rob her of it? Did he only keep her to work for him? If so, she'd very soon put that to rights by chucking up her engagement; then he would be forced to keep her; she wasn't going to be bullied. Dick, in his usual kind way,

tried to calm her. He explained to her their position, told her of his projects. But the fear of discovery was a fixed thought in her mind, and she refused to listen to reason until he put his hand in his pocket and gave her two pounds ten. This was just the sum required to pay what she owed at the Ayre Arms. Then, seeing her difficulties removed, her better nature asserted itself, and, after a moment of trembling reflection, the tears started to her eyes, and she begged of Dick to forgive her. She had lost her temper, and she did not know what she was saying. For a swift instant she thought of confessing the truth, but the idea died in a resolution to amend. It was not worth speaking of; she was getting stronger, and would need no more stimulants.

And for two days Kate kept to her promise; instead of sitting at home, she called on one of the ladies of the theatre, and passed a pleasant morning with her. Struck by this success, she paid visits to other members of the company, and went out shopping with them. But when three or four met at the corner of a street, after a few introductory remarks, a drink was generally proposed, not as men would propose it, but slyly, and with much affectation. Skirting furtively along the streets, a quiet bar would be selected, and then, "What will you have, dear?" would be whispered softly. "A drop of gin, dear." On one of these occasions Kate only just escaped getting hopelessly drunk. Fortunately, Dick did not return home to dinner, and a good sleep and a bottle of soda-water pulled her together, so that she could go down to the theatre and play her part without exciting observation. This decided her not to trust herself again to the temptation of her girl friends, and she asked Dick to allow her to accompany him sometimes. He made a wry face at this proposal, hesitated, and explained that his collaborator suffered no one to interrupt their *seances;* he was a timid man, and couldn't work in the presence of a third person. Kate only sighed, but although she did not attempt to dispute the veracity of this statement, she felt that it was cruel that she should be left thus, hour after hour, entirely alone. She deceived herself, however, with resolutions

and hopes that she would require no more brandy. But in her heart of hearts she knew that she would not be able to resist, and, docile as the sheep under the butcher's hand, she recognized her fate, and accepted it. A new novel was bought, a fresh bill run up at the grocer's, and the mornings were passed in a state of torpor. Without getting absolutely drunk, she drank sufficient to confuse her thoughts, to reduce them to a sort of nebulæ, enough to blend and soften the lines of a too hard reality to a long sensation of tickling, in which no idea was precise, no desire remained long enough to grow to a pain, but caressed and passed amorously away. Sometimes, of course, she overdosed herself, but on these occasions, when she found consciousness slipping a little too rapidly from her, she was cunning enough to go and lie down. Living, as she did, in constant fear of detection, she endowed the simplest words and looks with a double meaning, and she could not help hating him if he asked her questions or dared to accuse her of being sleepy and heavy about the eyes. Did he intend to insult her—was that it? if so, she wasn't going to stand it. But the climax was reached when one day he stood before the oleograph, apparently examining with deep interest the different aspects of the Swiss scenery. In reality, his thoughts were far away, but Kate, who did not know this, grew so nervous and angry, that it was with difficulty she contained herself.

On half a dozen different pretexts she had tried to get him away. There was a bottle hidden behind the blue mountains, and should he touch them, discovery was inevitable. Under these circumstances, there was nothing to do but fly into a violent passion, so snatching up a plate from the table she dashed it violently against the ground. The color rushed to her forehead, and she abused him roundly for his neglect. Was she so utterly beneath his notice that he could not even answer a question? The crash caused Dick to jump round as if he had been shot, and he sought to pacify his wife. This was not easy, and almost every day a dispute of the same sort arose. Danger of discovery assailed her from all sides, and this engendered, if not hatred, a fierce resentment; and to deceive

herself as to the true reason she criticised his conduct and manner of life bitterly and passionately from every point of view. Jealousy was natural to her; it had been long smouldering in her heart. Once or twice it had blazed into flame, but circumstances had, for the time being, quenched it. Now there was nothing to oppose it, and it burnt with resistless fury. All things served as fuel, and inwardly Kate raged for some opportunity to show her spite. She was conscious of no wrongdoing, she believed, and believed sincerely, that she was acting legitimately in defence of her own interests. Certain she was that Dick was deceiving her, and the want of moral courage in the man, which forced him to tell lies—lies in which he was sometimes found out—tended to confirm her in this belief. For a few days past a quarrel had been preparing. It was a weapon that had been forged by a thousand strokes, fashioned by insults and tempered in the cruelest slanders. Still the time for fight had not yet come, and she chafed under the delay. One night, however, he kept her waiting half an hour at the stage-door. Where had he been to? what had he been doing all this while? were the questions she put to him in many different forms of phrase as they walked home. Dick assured her he had been detained by his manager, who wanted to speak with him concerning a new production. He had been asked to undertake the arrangement of some of the processions. But Kate would not accept any of these excuses, and she quarrelled venomously. Convinced he had been after a woman, she stuck to her opinion, and the bickering continued. It was very irritating. After a wearying argument, full of protestations, admonitions, and promises, a long silence would establish itself between them, and, fondly hoping that peace was restored, the man would allow his thoughts to take up the thread of some theatrical difficulty—the price of the ballet-girls' dresses, or the possibility of the refreshment contractor advancing some money on the bars. Nothing more was said until they got up to their room, and then Dick, as usual, forgetful of even the immediate past, began to speak of his manager's intentions regarding a new piece. He did not, however, get far

before he was brought to a sudden standstill by a fresh explosion of wrath.

"What have I done now?" he asked.

"Done! Do you suppose I want to hear about that woman?"

"What woman?"

"Oh! you needn't do the innocent with me!"

"Really! I give you my word——"

"Your word! a nice thing, indeed!"

"Well, what do you want me to do?"

"To leave me in peace," said Kate savagely breaking the string of her stays.

Dick, who was very tired, took the hint, and, without attempting to argue the point further, quietly undressed and got to bed. There the quarrel was resumed, and for an hour or more a sort of guerilla warfare was maintained. He lay with his head turned close to the wall; hers danced over the extreme edge of the pillow, and the sound of her complaining voice harassed the darkness of the room. The same tale was repeated without mercy.

"Why don't you go away and leave me? I cannot think how you can be so cruel, and to me, who gave up everything for you!"

It was the wail of petulant anger; but as yet she showed no violence, and it was not until her husband, worn out by two hours of unceasing lamentations, begged of her to allow him to go to sleep, that her temper commenced to overcome her. In the morning, however, she was more agreeable, and it was not until she had paid a couple of visits to the blue Swiss mountains that she became again taciturn and irritable. Dick, on his part, did not as yet even remotely suspect his wife of drunkenness, he merely thought that she had grown lately very ill-tempered, and that a jealous woman was about the most distressing thing in existence; and, anxious to avoid another scene, he hurried through his breakfast. She watched him eating in silence, knowing well he was counting the minutes till he could get away. At last she said:

"Will you take me to church to-day?"

"My dear, I'm afraid I've an appointment, but I'll try to come back if I can."

Knowing very well that he had no intention of returning she said nothing, and a few minutes later, after asking speciously up to what time he would find her in, he slipped away. Then what to do she knew not, unless, indeed, she invited the landlady to come up and have a glass with her; but feeling somewhat out of humor for the turgid conversation of that respectable person, she put on her hat and ran after her husband, determined to watch him. But he was not to be seen, and after roaming aimlessly about for some time she turned into a church, and sat through the whole of the service. She did not attempt to keep her attention fixed on what was going on, but to kneel down, to stand up, with the crowd—that is to say, to abandon herself to a general impulse—was in itself a relief, and relaxed the strain of her thoughts. Her fevered hand twitched, her eyes stared painfully, her brain boiled with angry excitement, and when church was over she wandered through the town, drinking at the different public-houses. When she got home she was slightly boozed; but feeling somewhat less miserable and wretched, she inquired after Dick. He had not yet come in. This was unfortunate, for her heart, that was relenting towards him, was again, in a swift moment of suspicion, tightened into bitterness, and in the solitude of her room, asking herself why he treated her thus cruelly, she worked herself into a state of positive frenzy. It pretty nearly drove her mad to think that at the moment she was patiently waiting dinner for him he might be in the arms of another woman; and when the landlady came upstairs a second time in hope of a sociable glass, Kate told her she might bring the soup up (they always had soup on Sundays); that if Mr. Lennox didn't choose to come in for his meals he might go without them. At that moment a ring at the door was heard, and Dick walked into the room. Throwing himself into an arm-chair he said:

"I declare I never was so tired in my life, I'm dead beat.

"I daresay you are, I can easily understand that," was the curt reply.

An expression of pain passed over his face.

"Goodness me, Kate!" he said in a perplexed voice. "You don't mean to say you are angry still."

No attention was paid to the landlady, who was placing the soup on the table, and she, being pretty well accustomed to their quarrels, said with an air of indifference as she left the room:

"Dinner is served, I shall bring the leg of mutton up when you ring."

No answer was made to her, and the couple sat moodily looking at each other. After a pause, Dick tried to be conciliatory, and in the most affectionate phrases he could select he besought Kate to make it up.

"I assure you, you are wrong," he said, "I have been after no woman. Do, for goodness sake, make it up."

Then approaching her chair, he tried to draw her toward him, but pulling herself away passionately, she exclaimed:

"No, no, leave me alone—leave me alone—don't touch me—I hate you."

This was not encouraging, but at the end of another silence he attempted again to reason with her. But it was useless; and worn and impatient, he begged of her at least to come to dinner.

"If you aren't hungry, I am."

There was no answer; lying back in her chair she sulked, deaf to all entreaty.

"Well, if you won't I will," he said, seating himself in her place.

Her eyes flashed with a dull lurid light, and walking close to the table, she looked at him steadily, fidgetting as she did so with the knives and glasses.

"I can't think how you treat me as you do; what have I done to you to deserve it? Nothing. But I shall be revenged, that I will; I can bear it no longer."

"Bear what?" he asked despairingly.

"You know well enough. Don't aggravate me. I hate you! Oh, yes," she said, raising her voice, "I do hate you!"

"Sit down and have some dinner, and don't be so foolish," he said, trying to be jocular, as he lifted the cover from the soup.

"Eat with you? Never!" she answered theatrically. But the interest he showed in the steaming liquid annoyed her to such a degree, that overcome by a sudden gust of passion she upset the tureen into his lap. Dick uttered a scream, and in starting back he overturned his chair. Although not scalding, the soup was still hot enough to burn him, and he held his thighs dolorously. The tablecloth was deluged, the hearthrug steamed; and, regardless of everything, Kate rushed past, imprecating violently as she went. In brief, broken phrases, she accused her husband of cruelty, of unfaithfulness, stopping only to reproach him with a desire to desert her. Dick said nothing, nor could he, so quickly did her words flow, but in dripping trousers watched her in mute astonishment. With mild looks for words, he asked, What does all this mean? What have I done? The expression of his face changed till it seemed to say, you surely must have gone mad to act like this. Of complex emotions in the scene there were none, only a deaf fixity of intention, such as two quarreling animals are conscious of in their prolonged disputes.

The brown of Kate's eyes was dim, but occasionally it flashed to a dull gold tint, and as she hurried up and down the room, her hair became unloosened and hung down her shoulders, like a sheaf of black plumes. Dick thought of changing his clothes, but the intensity of her passion detained him. Stopping suddenly before the table she poured out a tumbler of sherry, and drank it almost at a gulp. Nauseous it was to her taste as lukewarm water, and she yearned for the burning fervors of brandy. They would sting her, would awake the dull ache of her palate to life to animation. She knew well where was the bottle, she could see it in her mind's eye, the darling black neck leaning against the frame of the picture. Why should she not go and fetch it, and insult him with the confession of her sin? Was it not he who drove her to it? So Kate thought in her madness, and the lack of courage to execute her wishes angered her still further against the fat creature who lay

staring at her, lying back in the arm-chair. Applying herself again to the sherry she swallowed greedily.

"For goodness sake," said Dick, who began to get alarmed, "don't drink like that! You'll get drunk."

"Well, what does it matter if I do? It is you who drive me to it. If you don't like it, go to Miss Vane."

"What! You've not finished with that yet? Haven't I told you twenty times that there's nothing between me and Miss Vane? I haven't spoken to her for the last three days."

"That's a lie!" shrieked Kate. "You went to meet her this morning. I saw you. Do you take me for a fool? But oh! I don't know how you can be such a beast! If you wanted to desert me, why did you ever take me away from Hanley? But you can go now, I don't want the leavings of that creature."

Taken aback by what was nothing more than a random guess, Dick hesitated, and then deciding that he might as well be caught out in two lies as in one, he said, as a sort of forlorn hope:—

"If you saw us you must have seen that she was with Jackson, and that I did not do any more than raise my hat."

Kate, who was too excited to follow out the train of the simplest idea, made no answer, and continued to rave forth incoherent statements of all kinds. In the meanwhile, the landlady came up to ask when she should bring up the leg of mutton, but she went away frightened. There was no dinner that day. Amid screams and violent words the evening died slowly, and the room darkened until nothing was seen but the fitful firelight playing on Dick's hands; but still, through the shadows, passed, like a figure of avenging fate, the vague form of the woman. Would she never grow tired and sit down? he asked himself a thousand times. It seemed as if it would never cease, and the incessant repetition of the same words and gestures turned in the brain with the mechanical movement of a wheel, dimming the sense of reality and producing the obtuse terror of a nightmare. But from this state of semi-con-

sciousness he was suddenly awakened by the violent ringing of the bell.

"What do you want? Can I get you anything?"

Kate did not deign to answer him. When the landlady appeared, she said:—

"I want some more sherry, I am dying of thrist."

"You shall not have any more," said Dick, interposing energetically. "Mrs. Clarke, I forbid you to bring it up."

"I say she shall," replied Kate, her face twitching with passion.

"I say she shall not."

"Then I'll go out and get it."

"No, I'll see you don't do that," said Dick, getting between her and the door. As he did so he turned his back to speak to the landlady. Kate seized a handful of the frizzly hair and almost pulled him to the ground. Twisting round he took her by the wrist and freed himself, but this angered and still further excited her.

"You'd better let her have her way," said the landlady. "I won't bring up much, and it may put her to sleep."

Dick, who at the moment would have given half his life for a little peace, nodded his head affirmatively, and went back to his chair. He did not know what to do. Never had he witnessed so terrible a scene before. Since three or four days back this quarrel had been working up crescendo, and now the landlady brought up the sherry. Kate seized the decanter, and, complaining that it was not full, resumed her drinking.

"So you see I did get it, and I'll get another bottle if I choose. You think that I like it. Well, you are mistaken; I don't, I hate it. I only drink it because you told me not, because I know that you begrudge it to me, you begrudge me every bit that I put into my mouth, the very clothes I wear. But it was not you who paid for them. I earned the money myself, and if you think to rob me of what I earn you are mistaken. You shan't. If you try to do so I shall apply to the magistrate for protection. Yes, and if you dare to lay a hand on me I shall have you locked up. Yes, yes—do you hear me?" she screamed, advancing towards him, spilling as she did the glass of wine she held

in her hand over her dress. "I shall have you locked up, and I should love to do so, because it was you who ruined me, who seduced me, and I hate you for it."

She spoke with a fearful volubility, and her haranguing echoed in Dick's ears with the cruel meaningless sound of a water-tap heard splashing on the flagstones of an echoing courtyard.

Sometimes he would get up, determined to make one more effort, and in his gentlest and most soothing tones would say:

"Now look here, dear, will you listen to me? I know you well, and I know you are a bit excited; if you will believe me——"

But it was no use. Apparently she did not hear him. Indeed, it almost seemed as if her ears had become stones. Her hands were clenched, and dragging herself away from him, she would resume her tigerish walk. The roaring solitude of an African forest is all that that terrible midnight can be compared to. Sometimes Dick wondered at the strength that sustained her, and the thrill of joy that he experienced was intense, when about two o'clock, after eight or ten hours of the terrible punishment, he noticed that she seemed to be growing weary, that her cries were becoming less articulate. Several times she had stopped to rest; her head sank on her bosom, and every effort she made to rouse herself was feebler than the preceding one. At length her legs gave way under her, and she slipped insensible on the floor.

Dick watched for a time, afraid to touch her, lest by some horrible mischance she should wake up and recommence the terrible scene that had just been concluded, and at least half an hour elapsed before he could muster up courage to undress her and put her to bed.

CHAPTER XXV.

NEXT morning, when recovered from her drunken fit, Kate was duly repentent, and she begged of Dick to forgive her for all she had said and done. She told him that she loved him better than anything in the world, and she persuaded him that if she had taken a drop too much, it was owing to jealousy, and not to any liking for the drink itself. Why, oh why! did he make her jealous? It was that that maddened her. When she thought of his being with another woman she was not responsible for her actions, and he must forgive her. Dick adopted the theory willingly (every man is reluctant to believe that his wife drinks), and thoroughly deceived by the credulity with which he had accepted her excuse, Kate resolved to endure the direst pangs that jealousy could inflict upon her rather than have recourse to brandy for relief. Jealousy! Chance hews the cornerstone of our lives. She had discovered the word—the plinth whereon to erect a guardian demon.

Nevertheless she was true for a time to her resolve, and submitted to Dick's neglect with almost stoic resignation. Had she remained in Manchester, or had she even been placed in surroundings that would have rendered possible the existence of a fixed set of principles, she might have cured herself of her vice. But before two months her engagement at the Prince's came to an end, and Dick's at the Royal very soon followed suit. They then passed into other companies, the first of which dealt with large Shakespearean revivals. Dick played successfully Don John in *Much Ado About Nothing,* the Ghost in *Hamlet,* the Friar in *Romeo and Juliet.* Kate on her side represented with a fair amount of success a series of second parts, such as Rosalinde in *Romeo,* Bianca in *Othello,* Sweet Ann Page in the *Merry Wives.* There were times when her behaviour was not all that could be desired, sometimes from jealousy, some-

times from drink; generally from a mixture of the two. But on the whole she managed very cleverly, and it was not more than whispered, and always with a good-natured giggle, that Mrs. Lennox was not averse to a glass. From the Shakespearean they went to join a dramatic company, where houses were blown up and ships sank amid thunder and lightning. Dick played a desperate villian, and Kate a virtuous parlor-maid, until one night, having surprised him in the act of kissing the manager's wife, she ran off to the nearest pub, and did not return until she was horribly intoxicated. Calling him the most awful names, she staggered on to the stage, accusing him at the same time of adultery, and pointing out the manager's wife as his paramour. There were shrieks and hysterics, and Dick had great difficulty in proving his innocence to the angry *impresario*. He spoke of his honor and a duel, but as the lady in question was starring, the benefit of the doubt had to be granted her. On these grounds the matter was hushed up. Nevertheless, after so public an *esclandre* it was impossible for the Lennoxes to remain in the company. Dick was very much cut up about it, and, without even claiming his week's salary, he and his wife packed up their baskets and boxes and returned to Manchester. There he entered into a quantity of speculations, of the character of which she had not the least idea; all she knew was, that she never saw him from one end of the day to the other. Out of the place he was at ten o'clock in the morning, and never did he return before twelve at night. These hours of idleness and solitude were hard to bear, and Kate begged of Dick to get her an engagement. But, fearful of another scandal like the last, he always gave her the same answer—that he had as yet heard of nothing, but as soon as he did he would let her know. Believe him she didn't, but she had to submit, for she could never muster up courage to go and look for anything herself, and the long summer days passed wearily in reading the accounts of the new companies, and the new pieces produced. This sedentary life, and the effects of the brandy, which she could now no longer do without, soon began to tell upon her health, and the rich olive complexion

began to fade to a sickly yellow. Even Dick noticed that she was not looking well; he said she required change of air, and a few days after he burst into the room and told her gaily that he had just arranged a tour to go round the coast of England and play little comic sketches and operettas at the pier theatres. This was good news, and the next few days were fully occupied in trying over music, making up their wardrobes, and telegraphing to London for the different books wherefrom they would make their selections. A young man whom Dick had heard singing in a public-house proved a great hit. He wrote his own words, some of which were considered so excruciatingly funny that at Scarborough and Brighton he frequently received a couple of guineas for singing a few songs at private houses after the public entertainment. Afterwards he appeared at the Pavilion, and for many years supplied the axioms and aphorisms that the *jeunesse dorée* of the metropolis are in the habit of using to garnish the baldness of their native speech.

For a time the sea proved very beneficial to Kate's health, but the never-ending surprises and expectations she was exposed to finished by so straining and sharpening her nerves that the stupors, the assuagements of drink became, as it were, a necessary make-weight. Her love for Dick pressed upon and agonized her; it was a dagger whose steel was being slowly reddened in the flames of brandy, and in this subtilization of the brain the remotest particles of pain detached themselves until life seemed to her nothing but a burning and unbearable frenzy. What she wanted of him she knew not, but with a longing that was nearly madness she desired to possess him wholly; she yearned to bury her poor aching body, throbbing with the anguish of nerves, in that peaceful hulk of fat, so calm, so grand, so invulnerable to pain, marching amid, and contented in, its sensualities, as a stately bull grazing amid the pastures of a succulent meadow.

Unkind he never was to her; the soft sleek manner that had won her remained ever the same, but she would have preferred a blow. It would have been something to have felt the strength of his hand upon her. She wanted an emo-

tion; she longed to be brutalized. She knew when she tortured him with reproaches she was alienating from herself any affection he might still bear for her; but, nevertheless, she found it impossible to restrain herself. There seemed to be a devil within her that goaded her until all power of will ceased, and against her will she had to obey its behests. A blow might exorcise this spirit. Were he to strike her to the ground she thought she might still be saved; but, alas! he remained as kind and good-natured as ever.

The bottle was now generally hidden under the mattress; and to disguise her drunkenness she had to exaggerate her jealousy. The two were now mingled so thoroughly in her head that she could scarcely distinguish one from the other. She knew there were women all around him; she could see them ogling him out of the little boxes at the side of the stage. How they could be such beasts she couldn't conceive. Behind the scenes they stood for hours waiting for him, and she was told they had come for engagements. Baskets of food came for him, pork pies and tongues, but these she pitched out of the window; and the ears of one little wretch, whom she had found loitering about the stage-door, she had soundly boxed.

Sometimes in her suspicions Kate was right, sometimes wrong, but in all and every case they accentuated the neurosis, occasioned by alcohol, from which she was suffering. Still by some extraordinary cunning, she contrived for some time to regulate her drinking so that it should not interfere with business, and on the rare occasions when Dick had to apologize to the public for her non-appearance she insisted that it was not her fault; and from a mixture of vanity, and a wish to conceal his wife's shame, the poor man still believed, and argued with the friends who knew of his trouble, that his wife had no real taste for liquor—that she never drank except when she had "those infernal jealous fits upon her."

But instead of diminishing, their quarrels seemed to grow of more frequent occurrence. After the big row, when she threw the soup tureen into his lap, for a month nothing except a few disagreeable evenings disturbed their peace; but lately two fights, that had lasted respectively two and three

days, had rendered the continuance of the sea-side tour impossible. Jealousy might or might not be the cause, but at any rate Kate was often in a state that prevented her appearance on the stage, and, as nothing could be done without her, Dick had begun to think of returning to London. He had been now in the provinces some years, and up in town changes might have occurred which he hoped to be able to turn to his advantage: nearly all recent speculations had proved successful, and out of the piers he had saved a couple of hundred pounds.

For the provincial actor a London theatre is a temptation at once divine and irresistable, and Dick had met lately a very extraordinary person, whom he thought might be worth looking after. Is it necessary to say that this being was a woman? The acquaintanceship had come about in this way. One morning Dick had escaped from his wife, who was raging about the house in a towering passion. Wearied with the shrieked upbraidings which had been ringing in his ears since morning, his thoughts turned to some place where he could find peace and solitude. The pier being completely deserted at two o'clock, he had gone down there, and sitting on one of the benches in the sun, he watched idly the liquid tranquillity of a tide that has attained its plenitude amid the languors of a windless day. No sun was visible, but the sky was full of an inner radiance, and one black boat heaved voluptuously on the sweet blue bosom of the sea. The heat was sweltering, and in the solitude of the baking woodwork a few officials moved round the theatre, whose tin cupolas were scarcely visible against the discolored blue of the sky.

But, "out of sight, out of mind;"—he had already almost forgotten Kate's unfortunate caprices of temper, and a thousand theatrical projects had begun to balance themselves in his mind, when his attention was attracted by a strange-looking creature in a green silk dress. The color contrasted vividly with the pale shimmer of the sea, and judging from the monstrous coquetry with which the wearer caught up the voluminous skirt, it was impossible not to think of her but as the inmate of an asylum. As if fascinated, Dick watched her. They were alone on the deck.

As she passed she bowed, smirked, looking back over the green silk with the most grotesque movements possible to imagine. Her gilt hair slipped from under a black battered bonnet, and in huge, shapeless hands she held a manuscript which she glanced at from time to time.

"She's learning a part, I'll be hanged if she ain't. I wonder who she can be? What a good make-up that would be for a farcical comedy," thought Dick.

Up and down she went, flaunting herself like an aged cockatoo in the sun.

At last he determined to speak to her, and having noticed that she generally made a pause at one particular part of her eccentric promenade, he went and stationed himself there. The thing was done in a second; encouraged by a couple of good ogles, he ventured to remark that the solitude of the pier was favorable to study.

"Yes, at this time of the day, but at all others it is crowded with the hubbub of the world that knows no aspiration; but now, in front of the sea, I can fancy myself alone with my heroes."

"And who are your heroes, may I ask?" said Dick, repressing a smile. This was even more than he had expected.

"My heroes are here," she answered, tapping the manuscript with her knotted fingers, "the brave young spirits of the old world."

"Oh, I see; that is one of your own poems, I suppose?"

"Yes; I am studying it for recitation. I am going to recite it at a lecture on the chastity of the marriage state, which I am going to give next week at the Working Men's Club."

"And is the poem on the subject of the chastity of the marriage state?"

"Only indirectly, just as, indeed, are all noble thoughts."

Dick did not understand, but the fact that a lady was going in for a recitation argued that she was interested in theatricals.

Then, with his ears pricked, like a hound who has got wind of something, he said with a sweet smile that showed a whole row of white teeth—

"Being an actor myself, I will take the liberty of asking you to allow me to look at your poem."

"So you are an actor! I was not, then, mistaken. I recognized that you looked nobler than the rest. But you asked to look at my poem. It is a classical cartoon."

"The devil it is," thought Dick. "I wonder what that means?"

"Would you like to hear me recite it?"

"Very much, indeed."

Settling herself into as dramatic an attitude as her sack-like body would allow, she began—

"Fifth Classical Cartoon.

"Harptiæ.

"The offspring of Neptune and Terra, daughters of earth and of ocean.
Dowered with fair faces of woman, capping the bodies of vultures;
Armed with sharp, keen talons; crushing and rending and slaying,
Blackening and blasting, defiling, spoiling the meats of all banquets;
Plund'ring, perplexing, pursuing, cursing the lives of our heroes,
Ever the Harptiæ flourish—just as a triumph of evil.
But their thousands on thousands flourish from childhood, ensnaring
By every art, trick of evil, weakness, deceit, and pollution.
The noble, the brave, and the loyal, spreading their nets for destruction.
Harptiæ waltz in our ball-rooms, breathing fierce breath that is poison
Over the promise of manhood, over the faith and the love-light
That glows in the hearts of our bravest for all of their kind that is weaker—
The chivalrous fire of knighthood that honors the title of woman.
Harptiæ stand by our altars, Harptiæ sit by our hearthstones.
Harptiæ suckle our children, Harptiæ ravish our nation." &c.

It would, however, be useless to relate further the cruelties the Harptiæ are in the habit of committing. For at least half an hour the cock-eye rolled, and the cracked voice poured out the verses with ever-increasing fury. Sometimes fearing they might be overheard, Dick looked round nervously. But all was still—the town dozed behind the green blinds of the distant houses, and the very water seemed too lazy to lap.

At last the chanting voice ceased and said in plain prose,

"I hope it touches a noble chord in your heart. Do you approve of my manner of giving the hexameters?"

"I think the idea very fine; but—but—if you'll permit me——"

"Certainly."

"Well, there are questions of elocution I would like to speak to you about. I am afraid that I have to run away now; but we are sure to meet again."

"You will find me every day at five at my hotel, and I should like to avail myself of your instruction."

"Thank you; I shall do myself the pleasure of calling on you to-morrow afternoon; so for the present good-by."

"You do not know my name. Oh! you men of genius are so full of forgetfulness," she said, ogling him until even her glass eye looked as if it were about to melt. "Here is my card."

Dick had no appointment. The reason of his desire to get away was fear of being surprised by his wife. Well-defined hopes of turning his strange acquaintance to account had arisen in his mind, and having no wish to see his plans nipped in the bud by stupid violence and jealousy, he had come suddenly to the conclusion that the interview had better be relegated to some more favorable spot than the publicity of the pier. Had the lady not given him her card he had intended to follow her home. There was no need for that now; but as he examined the piece of pasteboard a perplexed expression passed over his face. "Mrs. Forest, Mother Superior of the Yarmouth Convent, Alexandra Hotel, Hastings."

"By Jove! she is even more cracked than I thought. But if she were sane she'd be no use to me," he said chuckling. "Mother Superior! Classical cartoons! Chastity of marriage! What a combination! However, I shall know all about it to-morrow. I mustn't miss her. But I had better tear up this card. If Kate came across it all the fat would be in the fire. I sha'n't forget—Mrs. Forest, Alexandra Hotel." Then his thoughts faded into dreams, and when they again detached themselves, he murmured, casting the while the fragments of white paper into the

lazy, sun-stricken water. "No, I really couldn't; I hope it will be all strictly platonic."

It was this adventure that had finally decided Dick to try his fortune in London. His interview with the Mother Superior at the Alexandra Hotel had turned out a complete success, and after some hours of conversation certain conclusions had been arrived at. The story of the different soul-tremors and searchings which had induced her to establish a place of refuge for the weak in spirit had proved a little wearisome; but when it had been definitely ascertained that the convent was a thing of the past, and that the tastes of the Mother Superior were now operatically inclined, and that she had even gone so far as to compose the first act of a piece in which there was question of Buddhists, stars, daggers, and flowers, Dick, too, began to feel himself endowed with the gift of second sight, and to see visions of property-masters, Eastern scenery, and armies of red-legged girls, at whose head he should reign sovereign lord and master.

It was very unfortunate, he considered, that he could not attend the lecture on the chastity of marriage; but they were engaged to do a week at Margate, and he didn't care to disappoint the manager. Mrs. Forest might turn out, after all, the veriest of delusions. Far better give her an appointment, and engage to meet her at the beginning of next month in London; by that time he would be able to set everything straight, and wind up his little tour with appropriate decency.

Henceforth the nostalgia of the pavements took complete possession of him, and he counted the days he would still have to remain in these monotonous sea-side resorts listening to the perpetual quarrelling of his wife. He said little, but in his heart he was very weary of her, and he looked forward to London as the panacea for all his troubles. There, in a lodging well out of the way, up in Islington, for example, he hoped to settle her. There she would be completely lost, and he would be free to take up the thread of his old associations. A new door was opened to him, and through it he saw defiling a fresh series of adventures and speculations. Each day of delay hung

like a millstone round his neck. However, he had not long to wait. Chance came to his assistance and helped him along the road up which he had already travelled in imagination. Through the medium of the *poste restante* a correspondence had been established between himself and Mrs. Forest. Projects did not lag in this lady's mind. Excited by a mixture of personal vanity, blown to red-heat by the praises that had been lavished upon her opera, and a mad admiration of Dick, whom she addressed in her letters as a "god-like being," she had already commenced negotiations for the lease of a London theatre. Convents and platonic marriages were consigned to the limbo of forgotten things, and now at last in the heyday of her forty-fifth year, she saw herself the joyous possessor of love, fame, and a multitude of other things which she sought to give expression to in a series of classical cartoons. These were regularly received by the fat mummer, who, it is needless to say, thrust them as rapidly as possible out of the way. It took him as it was a great part of his leisure to extract from the quasi-hexametric letters that came with the poems the few phrases they contained to the point. "Nothing can be done without you," said Mrs. Forest, "and if you don't come at once we shall miss getting a theatre this season, and without a theatre we are helpless. The Church merely sketches the cold thin outline of humanity's passion in its appeal to its reasoning power of discrimination between right and wrong, while, on the other hand, the Stage takes into its picture of appeal all the vivid coloring of truth, etc."

"I know—four pages more of that rot; none of that for me," said Dick as he put the letter into his breast pocket, and went out to telegraph to Montgomery to engage rooms for them. Kate, when he told her of his plans, made no remark. Afraid to express an opinion, she remained silent, but in truth she was secretly delighted. She saw a possibility of realizing a long-cherished project. To a woman there is always an infinite charm in the society of a man to whom she never can, never intends to, give herself. The power that this platonic affection exercises over her is scarcely less ardent than the strongest sensual pas-

sion; it is the best poetry her nature is capable of, and for it many women will risk compromising themselves in their husband's eyes. The excitement of fancied victories obtained over themselves, of mock examinations of conscience, satisfies an ideal; and Kate, above most women, was subject to such nervous sentimentalities. Ever since the breaking up of the Constellation Company she had kept up a correspondence with Montgomery. She looked back sometimes with tears of pleasure to their long walks and conversations, when in mingled joy and fear she trembled lest he should pronounce the vows of love which she could see hesitating on his lips. To find, therefore, that in her life of change one thing remained unchanged would be in itself a delight. She was wearied of this perpetual dancing and serio-comic singing, and at times her head filled with vague remembrances of her successes in the part of Serpolette, she dreamed of the applause of a London theatre. She still entertained dim hopes of one day taking a definite place in her profession. Besides, the study that this ambition entailed would occupy her mind and enable her to conquer her passion for drink. This she was determined to do, for in her sober moments she did not fail to recognize the hold that it had upon her. "Ah! but all will be different in London," she would then say to herself, "it will be a new life. In these towns where one is only a few days—a week at the outside—there is nothing to do. In London we shall be settled in a home, and I shall have plenty to look after."

Such were Kate's hopes and expectations, but the reality unfortunately in no wise corresponded with the dream. A little lodging behind the Cattle Market in Islington, was the home he gave her, and there she was left from ten in the morning to twelve at night, to kill time as best she could. From the very first day, on the plea of searching for work, he had left her alone. She had pictured herself visiting the great thoroughfares, being appalled by the size of the shops, by the plate-glass and the immense showrooms, where, in blazing mirrors rutilant with gas and electric light, fairy-like ball dresses, wreathed with flowers, are prolonged to infinity. Then there were the theatres.

Of those wonderful pleasure-palaces, capable of realizing in consecutive acts the icy plains of the North Pole and the tropical luxuriance of South Africa, she had heard Dick and Montgomery talk until her brain turned with visions,—visions composed of the skirts of a million ballet-girls, of pink tights, and the radiant armor of a thousand choristers; of endless perspectives; of beautiful princesses singing in the green stillness of sycamore boughs, whilst above the dripping murmur of cascades shepherds listen to the longings of plaintive love.

A scattered and puzzling mixture of these two dreams made the psychology of Kate's mind on arriving in London. She had begged of Dick to take her out to see the sights, and he had promised to do so when he had time. The excuse grieved her but she said nothing, so determined was she to turn over a new leaf and control her temper. Montgomery came once to see her, but the visit had not proved as pleasant as either had expected. Anxious to know what her husband was doing, in what work he was engaged, she eagerly cross-examined the musician. In the name of their friendship she appealed to him to tell her the truth, but all she could get from him was an assurance that he knew nothing of Dick's affairs. The argument was continued for some time, increasing in warmth with each answer, until unable to contain herself she locked herself in her bedroom, leaving her platonic lover to find his way out of the house by himself.

For an hour she cried bitterly, feeling all the while that she was the most miserable woman in the world. Oh! what had she done? Was all she was suffering now a punishment for having run away from Ralph? (This was the first time she had thought of him for months.) She couldn't say, she didn't know. All she knew was that she wished she were dead. During these fits of dejection, the long, low cravings for drink that oppressed her were, as it were, irresistible. Sometimes they tempted her in the stomach, which imperatively demanded the warm comfort of the stimulant; sometimes it was in the throat that she felt the fiery fingers of the alcohol. And there the grasp tightened, until, with a convulsive movement, she would raise

her hands as if she intended to tear open her flesh to free herself from her tormentor. This was bad, but the worst of all was when the temptation attacked her in the head, and she remembered the delicious lassitudes the heavenly forgetfulness of her miseries that a few glasses of brandy would give her. Over and over again she would, with a shudder, chase the delicate vision from her mind. To avoid it she would move from one room to the other, from the armchair to the sofa. It was the regular English thirty-shillings-a-week lodgings. In the sitting-room there were the well-known prints, "With the Stream" and "Against the Stream;" the usual wax flowers stood on a mahogany stand; the familiar round table, with a sideboard, always emitting smells of tea and sugar, facing a hideous gilt mirror that stared above the mantelpiece. In the bedroom the worn carpet could scarcely be seen for large pieces of oilcloth. The white-curtained bed, however, looked clean; the basin-stand was broken, and the one window commanded a view of some tiled roofs, surmounted by red chimney pots, that, in their turn, were topped by arrows and other curious smoke-abating contrivances in zinc.

The landlady, the mother of ten children, who scrambled perpetually about the mouth of the kitchen staircase, was sulky and surly, and she resented all the attempts that Kate made to visit her in the parlor.

Thus passed away Kate's dreams of London. Maddened by regrets, despairs, and temptations, she had once, the third day after her arrival, attempted to see the town by herself. She felt very lonely, but determined not to be beaten, and imagining the magnificent shops, the monuments that were the wonder of the world, she strove to struggle through the sordid and barren streets of Islington. Dreaming she went, her head still filled with visions of wealth and grandeur, past butchers' and bakers' shops little better than those of Hanley. Was this all? Had London nothing more to show than this? she asked herself a hundred times. Having no knowledge whatever of the town, she could not apply to the policemen to direct her to any particular spot. What she wanted was to see Lon-

don, and she was in London, only it did not correspond in the least to the London of her imagination. Next day, however, she was more fortunate. Having consulted the landlady, she drove in a cab to St. Paul's, and then to the British Museum. There, through the cold spacious rooms, she wandered idly, too weary to try to interest herself in the long galleries of eternally suspended gestures. A tearless sorrow lay heavy on her heart, and the dust of many memories choked her, and when she again wandered into the sunlight that terrible feeling of strangeness grew upon her, that awful sensation of being lost amid a myriad beings, which a great city produces on a new-comer. All appeared to her impossible. The theatres of which she had heard so much faded from her mind, and she grew bewildered in the fearful Babel of scenes that crowded in limitless confusion upon her.

Down in the alleys in the dark shadows of archways she saw women in crumpled bonnets nursing children on their knees. With one hand they held the thin blue-veined breast, with the other the box of matches that saved them from the policeman's grip. Kate looked at these creatures in terror. In the streets the sunlight glared, falling on the pavements in wide sheets of whiteness. The traffic roared, the huge dray-horses and their piles of barrels crushed along the narrow ways, the hansom cabmen swore from their high seats; and through the fierce entanglement the white legs of a footman, the fat rein-holding hands of the coachman, and the aristocratic delicacy of two centuries of idleness, shading herself with sunward-slanting parasol, passed like a vision of fate mocking at the inutility of toil.

Asking her way of the blue-coated policemen who at the crossings directed the movements of this monster machine, Kate dragged through a series of squares and crescents until she came to the Euston Road; but Islington was still far away, and she lost herself a hundred times and had to retrace her steps. She could scarcely understand what was said to her; one turning was so like another and the labyrinth seemed so endless that she felt she would like to give up the struggle and in some quiet corner lie down

and die. The heat was suffocating, the trees were white with dust, and the acid smell of the fruit shops poisoned the stagnating air. Inside a public-house Kate had resolved not again to enter, but now so ill and exhausted did she feel that there was no manner of doubt in her mind that without some little refreshment she would never be able to get home. No sooner had this idea formed itself in her mind than a longing for a drop of gin assailed her with a fury so intense that to relieve herself of the excruciating pain of resistance she hastened her steps and entered the first public-house she came to. She could not wait to find a private corner, but boldly went up to a bar where a crowd of working men were drinking. A large strong girl was just being pushed through the swinging doors. Her black eyes stared with a strange fixity in the sunlight, and not recognizing the young man who was supporting her, she raised her bared arms vaguely, as if seeking to defend herself.

Kate cast one swift look of fear, but the craving for gin was in her throat, and she gave her order. Still there was enough shame left to make her speak of having walked a long distance, of having been overpowered by the heat of the sun. This was true, and after the flagstones and the raw midday glare, the cool sawdust-strewn floor and the subdued light of the bar were infinitely refreshing. And the gin! Never before had she experienced a sensation of such absolute relief. Perhaps no pleasure is equal in delight to the sudden cessation of pain, and in one moment all the awful weakness, mental and physical, that had made her life for many days an aching burden to bear, an aching sight to see, slipped from her, and she was transformed into a cheerful, happy woman. Life suddenly seemed to her as full of color and song as a May morning, and exchanging sympathetic remarks with the barmaid, she nibbled a hard biscuit. The roughs stared at her, but not offensively, and when they heard she was a stranger in town, chatted, she thought, pleasantly and good-naturedly. Still she was a little frightened, and in a few minutes she said she must be thinking of getting home,

and she left the public glad with the conviction of having spent there a very agreeable half-hour.

But long was the way to Islington, and more than once had she to stop to assuage her parched throat with another and another quartern. Fortunately she had not enough money with her to get absolutely tipsy, and when she staggered past the landlady, that severe moralist only stared after her, being uncertain whether it was drink or fatigue that made her lodger so uncertain on her legs. Next morning, of course, came the violent reaction—the gloom, the terrible despondency that the victories of stimulants over lassitudes of all kinds entail, and so depressed was Kate, so eagerly did she long for just one little drop to set her straight, that she did not attempt to detain Dick when he took up his hat and spoke of his appointment in the city at eleven. He seemed grateful for the respite from the usual reproaches, and gladly, when she asked him to give her five shillings, he slipped a sovereign into her hand. Then they parted for the day, mutually relieved of each other's society. At heart she hated to see him leave her; had it not been for the fierce craving for that which would dissipate the miserable melancholy that rendered existence unbearable she would have implored him to remain.

The minutes were counted until she thought he was fairly in his 'bus; then bonnet-strings were hurriedly tied, and with rapid steps she hastened away to buy the liquor herself. Her present landlady was not to be trusted. The idea of the necessity of keeping her strength up was always present in Kate's mind. She only wanted a little drop to pull herself together; she had drunk too much yesterday, it was true, but she would not do so again. To make sure of this she bought a supply of her favorite fiction, and with a bottle under her shawl and a bundle of *Family Heralds* in her hand she returned home unsuspected.

Then from morning to evening, locked in her room with the gin bottle on the table and the periodical on her knees, for a week she dreamed passively, re-living in confused remembrances her whole existence. Incapable of understanding a word of the book whose leaves she turned over,

her eyes looked stupidly into space. It seemed that her brain, saturated with sentimental adventures of all kinds, was incapable of absorbing any more. From her hands the journal would slip slowly, and she would abandon herself to a large, sad current of memory, on whose gray surface floated like rubbish trivialities of all kinds—recollections of commonplace events. From Hanley the torrent of the years came pouring through the devious winding channels of her Bohemian life; it rolled and eddied now round the remembrance of her dead child, like waves around a post so deeply sunk in the river's bed that its fury could not bear it away.

Ah! if the baby had lived she would have had something to live for; but now she was alone, she was deserted. Dick cared for her no longer. It was very cruel. What had she done to merit such unhappiness? Reflections such as these were generally the culminating point of the reveries, and then suddenly she would burst into a flood of tipsy tears. Sometimes she dreamed of pursuing her truant husband, but after a few staggering steps in the direction of the door she would relinquish the attempt, and guided by a sort of obtuse cunning would lie down on her bed and there sleep off the best part of her drunkenness. Then it was impossible when she awoke to undertake to do anything before having a drink, and so the days passed,—a moment of passion lost between a booze and a booze.

Yet no one suspected her. An instinct like that which guides a bird to conceal its nest continually saved her. She found that by passing her arm up the chimney she could reach a crossing flue where a good store of bottles might be hidden away, and when she went out to buy drink never did she forget to buy sweetstuff that would take all smell from her breath; nor did she ever neglect to complain of sick headaches, so that the landlady might not guess the reason of her constant siestas.

This period lasted until the sovereign he had given her was spent, and the last drop from the last bottle was drained. Feeling very bad one morning she had got up when Dick was asleep and finished what remained from overnight. The dose did her good, but not having any-

thing to eat after it, and fearing he would smell it upon her, she had shammed illness, and refused to get up for breakfast. For the same reason she had been afraid to ask him for any money before he left. She hoped to be able to pass one day at least without tasting drink. For an hour or more, ill and wretched, living upon herself like an animal in a state of torpor; and listening to a series of dreams that passed through her brain, she lay helpless and inert, plunged in a moody melancholy that robbed her of all powers of will. The landlady when she came to remove the breakfast things spoke kindly, and asked if she might get her a cup of hot tea. Sighing and complaining Kate consented, but when it was brought it tasted as filth in her mouth, and she had to put it away. By two o'clock she had succeeded in dressing herself; the craving for liquor then became intolerable; if she didn't take something she felt she would die; to bear up against the dreadful depression any longer was impossible; a little drop she must have to put her right, and she'd take no more. But apply to the landlady she dared not, credit she had none, being a stranger in the neighborhood; and she had no clothes of her own that she could well spare. At that moment her eyes fell on a pair of trousers belonging to Dick. She felt ashamed of herself, but she did not hesitate long. The strength of her desire killed her scruples, and with the garment wrapped up in brown paper she hurried out of the house. Dick would go on wearing what he had on for at least a day or two, and by that time she would have the money to redeem his pair of best trousers.

So eager was she that even the ominous three gilt balls did not cause her to hesitate, and throwing her parcel down on the counter she asked how much they would give her upon it. Five shillings was proposed. She at once agreed, and was hurrying away when the man handed her a quantity of letters he had taken out of one of the pockets. Putting them mechanically aside she thought nothing of the matter until, during the course of the evening, she remembered that she would have to put them away in some place where Dick would be likely to find them, without, however, being specially reminded of the absence of his

trousers. As she sought for a solution of this difficulty her attention was attracted by the fact that the handwriting was undoubtedly that of a woman. Instantly, like a fire burning sullenly in some dark dull twilight, a red flame of jealousy glowed through her drink-sodden brain. Ah! this was the business that kept him out all day, that did not leave him a moment to take her out; it was to be free to make love to this creature that he had buried her, his lawful wife, up in this filthy hole at the back end of Islington. Feverishly she strove to read, but the MS. was very difficult, and she beat her hands in little fits of mad rage at her inability to decipher these extraordinary effusions. The classical cartoons puzzled her for a long time, and holding her temples with both hands, Kate spelt through a great deal of number four. It was filled with allusions to heroes, the glory of manhood, and to the horrible river that guards the dominions of Pluto. Several times lines such as the following:—

"Zeus, the monarch of heaven, clothed in the form of a mortal,
Kneeling, caressed and caressing, drank from her lips joy and love-draughts."

caused Kate to dash the manuscript away from her, and to burst into hysterical tears.

Were these descriptions of love interviews which her husband had enjoyed? Kate asked herself, without, however, being able to arrive at any very definite conclusion. Whenever she thought she had hold of an important clue it slipped from her, lost in a flat fog of mythological references. Her very inability to understand, which she attributed to drink, made her more angry, and she was on the point of tearing the manuscript piecemeal, when she saw something that looked like prose on one or two of the flyleaves. The lady was in the habit of writing her notes on the back of her poems, and from these, though they were much obscured by ridiculously high-flown expressions, Kate was enabled to gather that Dick and a certain Mrs. Forest had taken a theatre, where they were rehearsing Montgomery's opera, preparatory to producing a grand

spectacular piece on an Indian subject by the author of the cartoons.

Staggering to her feet, Kate caught up the papers and heaped them away in one of Dick's drawers. Drunk as she was, the bitterness of what she had just learned rose, like burning vapor, through her intoxication, and she was shaken by an acute pain. Every feeling was tortured to the utmost, as a victim's joints might be on the rack. The man she loved—yes, with a love that touched on the confines of madness—she now knew was unfaithful to her. The suspicion that had for months been gnawing at her heart, serpent-like, opened its jaws to suck her down at once into its monstrous gullet. For her there was nothing now but to drink. She did not care now whether he saw her drunk or sober. What did it matter? So he had found a woman who was starting him in a theatre, and they were rehearsing Montgomery's opera, and they had never told her a word about it. They had never offered her a part, but had shut her up here out of the way. Through the great gloom of grief a small sorrow will often raise its face; and, like a small bird's call heard in the deeps of a roaring forest, this little cry of personal vanity sent forth from the bottom of her troubled heart a shrill, sharp note.

And Montgomery! This was the reason he had not been to see her; this, then, was the end of all their friendship!

Her grief appeared to her to be infinite, and, like clouds drifting through a gray expanse, recollections of all she had suffered flowed through her mind, and conscious of the terrible contradiction existing between her life as she had dreamed it and as it lay before her in all its miserable helplessness, she wept for hours. Even the bottle of drink lay untouched, and it was not until she heard her husband's step on the stairs that a throb of courage leaped into her heart.

Starting to her feet she stood waiting for him, her eyes dilated with passion. She did not attempt to put away the bottle of gin. What did it matter if he knew that she drank? Was it not he who drove her to it? Pushing the door open, Dick walked into the room with his deliberate, elephantine movements. The first glance showed him what

he had to expect, and he inwardly hoped that it was not going to be an all-night affair.

"Where have you been? You don't even come home to dinner now," she said in a voice made husky with drink.

"I couldn't to-day, I had such a lot of business to look after," he answered in the most conciliatory manner he could assume.

"Business! I know d——d well what your bus—iness was! I know all about it. You and your filthy woman, Mrs. Forest, and the theatre she has taken for you, where you are rehearsing Montgomery's opera," Kate exclaimed, sobered for a moment by the sheer force of her passion.

So astonished was he that instead of denying her accusations he stood wondering how she had obtained her information. At these evident signs of culpability her anger increased. She advanced upon him, her teeth set and her eyes staring as if they were going to drop from their sockets.

Dick watched in alarm. He really feared she was going mad, and with an instinctive movement he put out his arms to restrain her.

"Don't touch me! don't touch me!" she screamed, while she struck at him with white clenched hands.

Dick defended himself with the ease of a strong man, but nevertheless, she managed to strike him a heavy blow across the face.

"Take that, and that, and that, you beast! Oh, you beast! you beast! you brute!"

Her shrieks rang through the house. Pursuing her husband she struck at him. As she gathered her sleek little body to spring, he retreated round the table, like a lumbering bull striving to escape from an attacking feline creature.

"Ah! how do you like that?" she cried as she tore his face with her nails, and she laughed diabolically when she saw the blood trickling down his cheeks. "That will teach you to go messing about after other women. I'll settle you before I've done with you."

Dick asked her no more to keep quiet, but from time to time a fervid prayer rose up in his mind that the land-

lady might be out. Were she not, it were absurd to hope she would not hear, so awful was the noise. Chairs were thrown down, the coal scuttle had been upset, and at last, as Dick tried to get out of the room, Kate rushed against the rosewood cabinet which stood next the door, and one of the green china vases was sent, with its glass shade, crashing to the ground.

This unexpected incident caused Kate to pause in her attack, and in that moment the fictitious strength that passion had given ebbed suddenly from her, and she sank weak and breathless into a chair.

At the same time came a knock at the door. It was the landlady; and, trying to conceal his wounds, Dick strove to say something about his wife having had a fit.

"Fit or no fit, I hope you'll leave my house to-morrow."

Dick made no answer, but shutting the door in the face of the indignant householder, went into the bedroom to wash the blood from his face. Whilst so engaged he kept a close watch on his wife. She had poured herself out a large glass of raw gin, but he made no attempt to prevent her drinking it.

"The sooner she drinks herself helpless the better," he thought. "I shall then be able to put her to bed, and we shall have some peace."

For this purpose he remained as long as possible out of sight, and as he plastered his bleeding face he wondered how he should account for his wounds to Mrs. Forest. There was no doubt but that Kate had torn him very badly. The scratches she had given him before their marriage were nothing to these. One side of his nose was well-nigh ripped open, and there were two big, deep gashes running right across his face, from the cheek-bone to his ear. It was very lucky, he thought, she had not had his eye out. But how was he to account for his face? It would never do to say he had cut himself while shaving; and a bump against a wall in the dark did not, as an explanation, seem to him at all satisfactory.

Against his wife he felt no fiery resentment, only a vague and heavy regret that she could not contain herself, that she could not help giving way to these frantic jeal-

ousies. He had accepted in his good-natured manner the theory that she only drank when she was in a rage; but now as he undressed her and laid her in her half-unloosened clothes upon the bed, his eyes wandered round the room inquiringly: a hitherto unperceived association of ideas established itself in his mind, and as if by magic a thousand unconsisdered trifles were linked and revealed until the scattered ends were formed into a mass of seemingly irrefutable evidence. The languor, the momentary unconsciousness, the blinking of the eyes, the violent passions— he remembered them all, and their meaning suddenly became clear. Yes, there was little doubt of it; his wife was a confirmed drunkard. But no sooner had the thought framed itself than, resenting the vileness of the accusation, he commenced to argue with himself. He knew that she took a drop too much when she was in a passion, but believe that she was a confirmed drunkard he could not. To be that she would have to drink constantly, and he had never found the smell of drink upon her, nor a trace of it in the place. And yet— Here Dick's eyes wandered round the room, and he proceeded to make a thorough search. The wardrobes, the cupboards, behind the shutters, every recess was ransacked, but without avail. Pleased at his failure to discover proofs, but still not convinced, he stood in the middle of the floor irresolute. At last the fireplace attracted his attention. Deciding instantly, as if with an inspiration, he walked to it. He hesitated a moment, but, mastering his repugnance, he leaned, put his arm up, and brought down a bottle. Looking at it he read, "Best Old Tom." Another and another dive was made, until five large-sized bottles were placed on the hearthrug.

Comment was impossible, and listening to the hissing gaslight, he stood, unable to collect his thoughts, wondering vaguely how long she would have taken to have made up the half-dozen. Then, going to the bedroom door, he looked at her. Amid a mass of draggle-tailed skirt a pair of worn elastic-sides and a bit of striped stocking caught the eye.

CHAPTER XXVI

NEXT morning when Dick opened his eyes he rose from his uncomfortable position on the sofa, and stole very softly on tiptoe to the bedroom door and looked in. For a moment he considered the possibility of abstracting the basin from the stand; but remembering the sticking-plaster on his face, he decided that the best thing he could do would be to wash his hands and brush his clothes in a hairdresser's shop. Besides, as he had an appointment at the corner of the National Gallery with Mrs. Forest, it would not do to run the risk of awakening his wife. The line of bottles on the hearth-rug attracted his attention, and recalling as they did the terrible scene of the night before, a gray cloud passed over his face. For a moment he thought of removing them, but a glance at the clock showed that he had not a moment to lose, and he hurried away.

He was very dusty and dirty, but after the proposed two-penny clean, on the top of a 'bus he set himself to think out the stage arrangement for the wedding of the Prince Florimel.

With the exception of his domestic troubles, life had been flowing very smoothly for him of late. In the first place, Mrs. Forest was wildly in love with him, and that meant receiving checks and classical cartoons. The former were for different services rendered—the reconstruction of her opera, and the various expenses connected with the theatre. The reason for the sending of the latter was never explained, and Dick felt no curiosity on the subject, but contented himself with thanking the authoress for her gracious thoughts of him, and changing the conversation as rapidly as possible. This was not difficult to do, for they had always much business to talk over whenever they met. As indicated by the letter that had fallen into Kate's hands, Mrs. Forest and Dick were the

joint proprietors of the Opera Comique, and were now daily rehearsing Montgomery's opera. With the taking of the theatre Dick had had very little to do. "Inspired," as she said in one of her letters, "by his god-like presence, by the glory of his manhood, whose magnificence made her dream of the noble heroes of the Icelandic legends," she had determined that a stage was the fitting place for the exhibition of his "seraph-like qualities," and had acted accordingly. On this point she would take no refusal, nor, indeed, did Dick trouble her with one. "Most managements," he argued, "had been begun under similar conditions, and had in the end turned out every successful. Why not this one? To be sure, he hadn't much faith in her Indian opera, notwithstanding the bit of construction he had put into it, but that couldn't be helped. They were going, at any rate, to begin with Montgomery's piece, and that, he felt sure, would turn out all right; particularly since the suggestion he had made to Harding, who had done the book, for the introduction of certain effects—a devilish clever fellow—he had had his eye on him for some time. And, now he came to think of it, it wouldn't be a bad plan to get him to write up to Mrs. Forest's scenery and dresses. When her piece was a failure, they could put up the other, and in that way good material would not be let go to waste. The only thing was that Harding was going in for writing novels, and didn't seem to care much for theatrical work. Still, you could always get at authors when you had a bit of coin to show beforehand.

In this way Dick's thoughts ran on until the omnibus drove into Trafalgar Square, and Mrs. Forest's waddling walk was caught sight of. She was the first at the rendezvous.

"Good lord!" he said to himself, "isn't she awful! If it weren't for poor Montgomery and his piece I think I would drop her."

She certainly did look a ludicrous object. As she advanced to meet him, she smiled and ogled; and, holding up her skirt with the most coquettish movement, she held out to him a soft perspiring hand.

"You looked so noble, so grand, as you descended grappling with strong hands at the ladder, that I could not help thinking of my sixth classical cartoon. You received it, did you not?"

"Oh, yes!—yes, but for the moment I cannot recall the passage you allude to."

"I had no particular phrase in view, my hero, my young god, in my thoughts; but the general tone—did you not notice?" Then, after a long silence and a deep sigh, "But did you not notice that I introduced some lines, so as to relieve the—the—of the hexameter?"

"Of course I noticed it," said Dick, who had thrown the packet aside the moment he had satisfied himself that it contained no note referring to checks or the theatre, "and a very pretty song it was."

"Which one do you mean? The one Atalanta sings just before the Parcæ begin their chant?"

"Yes, that's it."

"'Ye gods, they fail, they falter,
Thy hand hath struck them down
Their woof the Parcæ alter.
Beware thy mother's frown!
What such as I in glory
Compared with such as thee?
Would, in the conflict gory,
That I had died for thee!'"

With lifted face Mrs. Forest recited these verses in a quailing undertone, the socket of her false eye watering profusely. She was not more than five feet high; Dick remained over six feet, dragged down as he was by the hobbling little tub by his side.

"Of course you understand what I meant to tell you in those verses?" said Mrs. Forest after a long silence.

Fearing a downright avowal of love, he squeezed the hand that lay on his arm.

"I like them as well as any I have written. They came to me without an effort. I never truly knew before the ecstasy of an inspiration. I was thinking of introducing them into my opera. How would you advise me?"

"I am afraid it is a bit serious, considered from the

point of view of a musical setting," he said, gladly availing himself of this occasion of changing the subject of the conversation, which was beginning to alarm him. "You know in an opera you want something more simple. But that reminds me. Have you heard from Taylor about the pages' dresses in the second act?"

"No; but I got a letter this morning from the scene-painter. He writes to say that——"

"Oh, that's no matter, he can wait! But will you promise to come round with me to the costumier's immediately after the rehearsal?"

"Of course I will promise you anything. You know I can refuse you nothing."

All Dick cared was that her affection for him should be sufficiently profound to ensure the safety of the ballet girl's dresses. To probe the secrets of her heart to any further extent he had no desire, and, eager to avoid any compromising confidences, he entered into a long description concerning the piece and its prospects of success, venturing even to discuss the ultimate fortunes of the theatre. Knowing that he would be sure to stumble against some acquaintance in the Strand, he led his fair companion through Long Acre and round by Drury Lane, praying the while that she might not cast any more of those ludicrously languishing glances at him. Whenever they came to a corner he looked anxiously round to see if they were watched. She did look, he thought, so frightfully rediculous, that it was a punishment to have to walk in the street with her.

At last they arrived at the stage entrance. It was in a small, narrow street. Groups of young girls and men who gave way respectfully before them blocked up the pavement. Dick felt as if he should die of shame. Mrs. Forest picked up her skirt, and flaunting and flirting like a grotesque bird, passed into the theatre, followed by a sniggering crowd.

In the meantime, Kate lay on her bed, helpless as ever, just as Dick had left her. It was not until he had given his preliminary instructions to the ballet-girls, and Montgomery had struck the first notes of his opening chorus,

that a ray of consciousness pierced through the heavy, drunken stupor that pressed upon her brain, with vague movements of hands, she endeavored to fasten the front of her dress, and with a groan rolled herself out of the light. But her efforts to fall back to insensibility were unavailing. Implacable as the dawn that slips and swells through the veils of night, a pale waste of consciousness forced itself upon her. First came the curtains of the bed, then the bare blankness of the wall, and then the great throbbing pain that lay like a lump of lead just above her forehead. Her mouth was clammy as if it were filled with glue, her limbs weak as if by violent blows they had been beaten to a pulp. She was all pain, but, worse still, a horror, huge and black, of her life crushed and terrified her, until she buried her face in the pillow and wept and moaned for mercy. Nevertheless, to remain in bed was impossible. The pallor of the place was intolerable, and sliding her legs over the side she stood, scarcely able to keep her feet. The room swam as if in a mist; she held her head with clasped hands; the top of it seemed to be lifting off. With much difficulty she staggered as far as the chest of drawers, and remained for some minutes trying to recover herself, thinking of what had happened overnight. She had been drunk, she knew that, but where was Dick? Where had he gone to? What had she said to him? All mental effort was agony; but she had to think, and straining at the threads of memory, she strove to follow one to the end. But it was no use. Hopelessly it entangled, and with a low cry she moaned, "Oh, my poor head! my poor head! I cannot, cannot remember." Still, the question, "What has become of Dick?" continued to torture her. Raising her face suddenly from her arms, she hitched up her falling skirts, and seeing at that moment the bottle on the table, she went into the sitting-room and poured herself out a little, which she mixed with water.

"Just a drop," she murmured to herself, "to pull me together. Oh! never will I take too much again; it was his fault; until he put me in a passion I was all right."

But at that moment the five bottles which Dick had taken out of the chimney and had left standing in a line

on the hearthrug caught her eyes, and she let fall on the table the tumbler she held in her hand. The thoughts the liquor had awakened in her were suddenly paralyzed, and all down her body she felt herself breaking into a cold sweat.

"So he has found it out—so he found it out," she murmured to herself; and then the sharp grinding noise of teeth was heard, her glance darkened, a lowering expression fixed itself upon her face, and with trembling fingers she poured herself out another glass of gin-and-water. A new life then seemed to generate, to be melting through her; ideas began to define themselves.

"Ah! so he has been spying after me," she murmured through her set teeth. "So he has been spying after me." And sudden as the fall of a curtain, hatred, bitter and black, fell in front of her mind, and in sullen impotence she raged against her husband. His innocence and her own culpability were as oil that fed, and as winds that blew the flames of her passion. To trample him under her feet, to tear him as a starving beast tears raw flesh, was all that she could now think of. She had not even presence of mind to invent an excuse whereby she might charge him with some part of her fault, of her sin. Up and down the room she walked, wringing her hands, beating them against the furniture in frantic paroxysms of fury. Her rage was blind and deaf; only a faint color of blood danced before her eyes, and it was thus she remembered the scenes of overnight, how she had torn his cheeks and had seen the blood flow. To do so again her fingers itched, and she longed to feel his flesh yielding beneath the sharp nails. Her nerves were strung like strained cords for the conflict. The solitude of the room irritated her; up and down she went, gradually wearing out the fictitious strength the glass of gin-and-water she had drunk had given her, and this continued until she again staggered under a profound feeling of weakness. Then she poured out some more spirits, and, having drunk them undiluted, she sank into a chair. But when the first moments of exhaustion were over she commenced to think more calmly, and through the stupor of her brain, clumsily, thoughts began

to appear. The curtain of black hate was still undrawn; but it was no longer tossed to and fro in gusts of passion, and more melancholy than ever in its foldless extent, it lay before her eyes.

She felt that she should never forgive him; and whenever she saw the five bottles, she experienced a sudden revolt, and her anger threatened to break forth again into wild gesticulations. But the gin held her back with mild persuasiveness, and for a long time she sat moodily thinking over her wrongs. And as her thoughts wavered they grew softer and more argumentative. She considered the question from all sides, and, reasoning with herself, was disposed to conclude that it was not all her fault. If she did drink, it was jealousy that drove her to it. Why wasn't he faithful to her? Had she not given up everything for him? Why did he want to be always running after a lot of other women? Where was he now, she'd like to know? As this question appeared in the lens of her thought, she raised her head from the hand on which it had sunk, and stared vacantly into space. Boozed as she was, the memory of the letters she had seen appealed to her.

"Oh, yes, that's where he's gone to, is it?" she murmured to herself. "So he's down with his poetess at the Opera Comique, rehearsing Montgomery's opera."

Slowly a determination to follow him formed itself in her mind, and she managed to map out the course that she would have to pursue. It seemed to her that she was beset with difficulties. To begin with, she did not know where the theatre was, and she could not conceal from herself the fact that she was scarcely in a fit state to take a long walk through the London streets. The spirit drunk on an empty stomach had gone to her head; she reeled a little when she walked; and her own incapacity to act maddened her. Oh, good heavens! how her head was splitting! What would she not give to be all right just for a couple of hours, just long enough to go and tell that beast of a husband of hers what a pig he was, and let the whole theatre know how he was treating his wife. It was he who drove her to drink. Yes, she would go and do this. Her head, it was true, seemed as if it were going to roll off her shoulders, but a

good sponging would do it good, and then a bottle or two of soda would put her quite straight—so straight that nobody would know that she had touched a drop.

It took Kate about half an hour to make her arrangements. In a basin she drenched herself, and regardless of her dress, let her hair lie dripping on her shoulders. The landlady brought her up the soda water, and seeing what a state her lodger was in, placed it on the table without a word, without even referring to the notice to quit she had given overnight. Steadying her voice as best she could, Kate asked her to call a cab.

"Hansom, or four-wheeler?"

"Fo—four wheel—er—if you please."

"Yes, that'll suit you best," said the woman, as she went downstairs. "You'd perhaps fall out of a hansom. If I were your husband I'd break every bone in your body."

Nevertheless, Kate was now much more sober, and weak and sick she leaned back upon the hard cushions of the clattering cab. Her mouth was full of water, and the shifting angles of the streets produced on her an effect similar to sea-sickness. London rang in her ears; she could hear a piano tinkling; she saw Dick directing the movements of a line of girls. Then her dream was brought to an end by a gulp. Oh! the fearful nausea; and she did not feel better until, flooding her dress and ruining the red velvet seats, all she had drunk came up. The vomit, however, brought her great relief, and had it not been for a little dizziness and weakness, she would have felt quite right when she arrived at the stage-door. She was in a terrible state of dirt and untidiness, but she noticed nothing; her mind was now fully occupied in thinking what she should say, first to the stage-door keeper, and then to her husband. But suddenly an immense lassitude overwhelmed her. She did not seem to have courage enough for anything, and she felt as if she would like to sit down on a doorstep and cry. The menacing threats, the bitter upbraidings she had intended, all slipped from her like dreams, and she felt utterly wretched.

At that moment, in her little walk up the pavement she found herself opposite a public-house. Something whis-

pered in her ear that after her sickness one little nip of brandy was necessary, and would put her straight in a moment. She hesitated, but some one pushed her from behind and she went in. Then a four of brandy freshened her up wonderfully. It enabled her to think of what she had come to do, and to remember how badly she was being treated. A second drink put light into her eyes and wickedness into her head, and she felt she could, and would, face the devil. "I'll give it to him; I'll teach him that I'm not to be trodden on," she said to herself as she strutted manfully, walking on her heels so as to avoid any unsteadiness of gait, towards the stage-door.

The man in the little box was old and feeble. He said he would send her name by the first person going down; but Kate was not in a mood to brook delays, and, profiting by his inability to stop her, she banged through the swinging door and commenced the descent of a long flight of steps. Below her was the stage. Between the wings she could see the girls ranged in a semi-circle. Dick, with a big staff in hand, stood in front of the footlights directing the movements of a procession which was being formed; the piano tinkled merrily on the O. P. side.

"Mr. Chappel, would you be good enough to play the 'Just put this in your pocket' chorus over again?" cried Dick, stamping his staff heavily upon the boards.

"Now then, girls, I hear a great deal too much talking going on at the back there. I dare say it is very amusing; but if you'd try to combine business with pleasure. Now, who did I put in section one?"

Kate hesitated a moment, arrested by the tones of his voice, and she could not avoid thinking of the time when she used to play Clairette; besides, all the well-known faces were there. Our lives move as in circles; no matter what strange vicissitudes we pass through, we generally find ourselves gliding once more into the well-known groves, and Dick, in forming the present company, had naturally fallen back upon the old hands, who had travelled with him in the country. They were nearly all there. Mortimer, with his ringlets and his long nasal drawl, stood, as usual, in the wings making ill-natured remarks. Dubois

strutted as before, and tilting his bishop's hat, explained that he would take no further engagement as a singer; if people would not let him act they would have to do without him. Miss Leslie, with her dyed hair tucked neatly away under her bonnet, smiled as agreeably as ever. Beaumont alone seemed to be missing, and Montgomery, in all the importance of a going-to-be-produced author, strode alone up and down the stage, apparently busied in thought. The tails of a Newmarket coat still flapped about his thin legs, and when he appeared in profile against the scenery he looked, as he always had done, like the flitting shadow thrown by an enormous magic-lantern.

Sullenly Kate watched them, tightly gripping the rail of the staircase. The momentary softening of heart, occasioned by the remembrance of old times, died away in the bitterness of the thought that she who had counted for so much was now pushed into a corner to live forgotten or disdained. Why was she not rehearsing there with them? she asked herself. At once the answer came. Because your husband hates you—because he wants to make love to another woman. Then a flood of mad passion rushed to her head, and, as a torrent a leaf, it carried her down the steps and sent her rushing on to the stage. She did not know what she was doing; she remembered not the dirty disorder of her person; she did not even hear Mortimer and Dubois cry out as she pushed past, "There's Mrs. Lennox!" She thought of nothing but to revenge herself.

In the middle of the stage, however, she looked round, discountenanced by the silence and the crowd, and, hoping to calm her, Dick advised her, in whispers, to go upstairs to his room. But this was the signal for her to break forth—

"Go up to your room?" she screamed. "Never, never! Do you suppose it is talk to you that I came here? No, I despise you too much. I hate you, and I want every one here to know how you treat me."

With a dull stare she examined the circle of girls who stood whispering in groups, as if she were going to address one in particular. Several drew back, frightened.

Dick attempted to say something, but it seemed that the very sound of his voice was enough.

"Go away, go away!" she exclaimed at the top of her voice. "Go away; don't touch me! Go to that woman of yours—Mrs. Forest—go to her, and be damned to you, you beast! You know she is paying for everything here. You know that you are——"

"For goodness sake remember what you are saying," said Dick, interrupting, and trembling as if for his life. He cast an anxious glance around to see if the lady in question was within hearing. Fortunately she was not on the stage.

The chorus, looking like a school in their walking-dresses, crowded timidly forward. The carpenters had ceased to hammer, and were peeping down from the flies; Kate, like the girl in the print dress she had seen drunk outside the public-house, stood balancing herself and staring blindly at those who surrounded her. Leslie and Montgomery, in the position of old friends, were endeavoring to soothe her, whilst Mortimer and Dubois argued passionately as to when they had seen her drunk for the first time. The first insisted that when she had joined them at Hanley she was a bit inebriated; the latter declared that it had begun with the champagne on her wedding-day.

"Don't you remember Dick was married with a scratched face?"

"To judge from present appearances," said the comedian, forcing his words slowly through his nose, "he's likely to die with one." At this sally three supers retired into the wings holding their sides, and Dubois, furious at being outdone in a joke, walked away in high dudgeon, calling Mortimer an unfeeling brute.

In the meantime the drunken row was waxing every moment more furious. Struggling frantically with her friends, Kate called attention to the sticking-plaster on Dick's face, and declared that she would do for him.

"You see what I gave him last night, and he deserved it. Oh! the beast! and I'll give him more; and if you knew all you wouldn't blame me. It was he who seduced me, who got me to run away from home, and he deserts

me for other women. But he sha'n't, he sha'n't, he sha'n't; I'll kill him first; yes, I will, and nobody shall stop me."

Looking quite broken with shame, Dick listened to these awful harangues. He had, in excuse for the absence of his wife, told Mortimer and Motgomery that London did not agree with her, and that she had to spend most of her time at the seaside. All had condoled with him. They were searching London for a second lady, and that Mrs. Lennox was just the person they wanted for the part all had agreed. What a pity, they said, she was not in town. At the present moment Dick wished her the other side of Jordan. For all he knew, she might remain screaming at him the whole day, and if Mrs. Forest came back—well, he didn't know what would happen, the whole game would then be up the spout, and what a shame, for Montgomery's opera, he felt sure, would be a success. Perhaps the best thing to do would be to tell him of the danger his piece was in; he might be able to get Kate away. They had always been friends; she might listen to him.

Such were Dick's reflections as he stood bashfully trying to avoid the eyes of his ballet-girls. He really didn't know where to go. In front of him there was a wall of people, whereon certain faces detached themselves. He saw Dubois' mumming mug widening with delight until the grin formed a semi-circle round the Jew nose. Mortimer looked on with the mock earnestness of a tortured saint in a stained glass window. The girls' faces, it must be said, all expressed pity; and a tall woman, who leaned a delicately gloved hand on a super's shoulder, looked as if she were going to melt with compassion.

But Kate, although held by Montgomery and Miss Leslie, still continued to advance. The long black hair hung in disordered masses; her brown eyes were shot with golden lights; the green tints in her face became, in her excessive pallor, dirty and abominable in color, and she seemed, indeed, more like a demon than a woman as her screams echoed through the empty theatre.

"By Jove! we ought to put up *Jane Eyre*," said Mortimer. "If she were to play the mad woman like that, we'd be sure to draw full houses."

"I believe you," said Dubois; but at that moment he was interrupted by a violent scream, and suddenly disengaging herself from those who held her, Kate rushed at Dick. With one hand she grappled him by the throat, and before anyone could interfere she succeeded in nearly tearing the shirt from his back.

When at length they were separated, she stood staring and panting, every fibre of her being strained with passion; and it was not until someone, in a foolish attempt to pacify her, ventured to side with her in her denunciations of her husband, that she again burst forth.

"How should such as you dare to say a word against him! I will not hear him abused! No, I will not; I say he is a good man. Yes, yes! he is a good man, the best man that ever lived!" she exclaimed, stamping her foot on the boards, "the best man that ever lived! I will not hear a word against him! No, I will not! He's my husband; he married me! Yes he did; I can show my certificate, and that's more than any one of you can. I know you, a damned lot of hussies! I know you; I was one of you myself. You think I wasn't. Well, I can prove it. You go and ask Montgomery if I did not play Serpolette all through the country, and Clairette too. I should like to see any of you do that, with the exception of Lucy, who was always a good friend to me; but the rest of you I despise as the dirt under my feet; so do you think that I would permit you—that I came here to listen to my husband being abused, and by such as you! If he has his faults he's accountable to none but me."

Here she had to pause for lack of breath; and Dick, who had been pursuing his shirt-stud, which had rolled into the footlights, now drew himself up, and in his stage-commanding voice declared the rehearsal to be over. Some few of the girls lingered, but they were beckoned away by others, who saw that the present time was not suitable for the discussion of boots, and tights, and dressing-rooms. There was then no one left but Leslie, Montgomery, Dick, Kate, and Harding, who, twisting his mustache, watched and listened apparently with the greatest interest.

"Oh, you have no idea what a nice woman she used to be,

and is, were it not for that cursed drink," said Montgomery, with the tears running down his nose. "You remember her, Leslie, don't you? Isn't what I say true? I never liked a woman so much in my life."

"You were a friend of hers then?" said Harding.

"I should think I was."

"Then you never were— Yes, yes, I understand. A little friendship flavored with love. Yes, yes. Wears better, perhaps, than the genuine article. What do you think, Leslie?"

"Not bad," said the prima donna, "for people with poor appetites. A kind of diet suitable for Lent, I should think."

"Ah! a title for a short story, or better still for an operetta. What do you think, Montgomery? Shall I do you a book entitled *Lovers in Lent,* or *A Lover's Lent?* and Leslie will——"

"No, I won't. None of your forty days for me."

"I can't understand how you people can go on talking nonsense with a scene so terrible passing under your eyes," cried the musician, as he pointed to Kate who was calling after Dick as she staggered in pursuit of him up the stairs towards the stage-door.

"Well, what do you want me to do?"

"She'll disgrace him in the street."

"I can't help that. I never interfere in a love affair; and this is evidently the great passion of a life."

Casting an indignant glance at the novelist, Montgomery rushed after his friends; but when he arrived at the stage-door he saw the uselessness of his interference.

In the narrow street, where the sun sweltered between the old houses that leaned and lolled upon the huge black traversing beams, like aged women on crutches, amid the stage carpenters, the chorus-girls, the idlers that a theatre collects, standing with one foot in the gutter, where vegetable refuse of all kinds rotted, Kate raved against Dick in language that was fearful to hear. Her beautiful black hair was now hanging over her shoulders like a mane; some one had trodden on her dress and nearly torn it from her waist, and, in avid curiosity, women with dyed hair peeped

out of a suspicious-looking tobacco shop. Over the way, stuck under an overhanging window, like a yellow eye, was an orange-stall; the proprietress stood watching, whilst a crowd of vermin-like children ran forward, delighted at the prospect of seeing a woman beaten. Close by, in shirt-sleeves, the pot-boy flung open the public-house door, partly for the purpose of attracting custom, half with the intention of letting a little air into the bar-room.

"Oh, Kate! I beg of you not to go in there," said Dick; "you've had enough; do come home!"

"Come home!" she shrieked, "and with you, you beast! It was you who seduced me, who got me away from my husband."

This occasioned a good deal of amusement in the crowd, and several voices asked for information.

"And how did he manage to do that, marm?" cried one.

"With a bottle of gin. What do you think?" cried another.

There were moments when Dick longed for the earth to open; but he nevertheless continued to try to prevent Kate from entering the public-house.

"I will drink! I will drink! I will drink! And not because I like it, but to spite you, because I hate you."

When she came out she appeared to be a little quieted, and Dick tried very hard to persuade her to get into a cab and drive home. But the very sound of his voice, the very sight of him, seemed to excite her, and in a few moments she broke forth into the usual harangue. Several times the temptation to run away became almost irresistible, but with a noble effort of will he forced himself to remain with her. Hoping to avoid some part of the ridicule that was being so liberally showered upon him, he besought of her to keep up Drury Lane and not descend into the Strand.

"You don't want to be seen with me; I know, you'd prefer to walk there with Mrs. Forest. You think I shall disgrace you. Well, come along then.

> "Look at me here, look at me there,
> Criticise me everywhere.
> I am so sweet," &c.

"That's right, old woman, give us a song. She knows the game," answered another.

Raising his big hat from his head, Dick wiped his face, and as if divining his extreme despair, Kate left off singing and dancing, and the procession proceeded in quiet past several different wine-shops. It was not until they came to Short's she declared she was dying of thirst and must have a drink. Dick forbade the barman to serve her, and brought upon himself the most shocking abuse. Knowing that he would be sure to meet a crowd of his "pals" at the Gayety bar, he used every endeavor to persuade her to cross the street and got out of the sun.

"Don't bother me with your sun," she exclaimed surlily; and then, as if struck by the meaning of the word, she said, "but it wasn't a son, it was a daughter; don't you remember?"

"Oh, Kate! how can you speak so?"

"Speak so? I say it was a daughter, and she died; and you said it was my fault, as you say everything is my fault, you beast! you venomous beast! Yes, she did die. It was a pity; I could have loved her."

At this moment Dick felt a heavy hand clapped on his shoulder. Turning round he saw a pal of his.

"What, Dick, my boy! A drunken chorus lady; trying to get her home? Always up to some charitable action."

"No; she's my wife."

"I beg your pardon, old chap; you know I didn't mean it;" and the man disappeared into the bar-room.

"Yes, I am his wife," Kate shrieked after him. "I got that much right out of him at least; and I played the Serpolette in the *Cloches*.

"Look at me here, look at me there!"

she sang, flirting with her abominable skirt, amused by the applause of the roughs. "But I'm going to have a drink here," she said, suddenly breaking off.

"No, you can't, my good woman," said the stout guardian at the door.

"And why—why not?"

"That don't matter. You go on, or I'll have to give you in charge."

Kate was not yet so drunk that the words "in charge" did not frighten her, and she answered humbly enough, "I'm here wi—th my hu—s—band, and as you are so im—impertinent I shall go—go elsewhere."

At the next place they came to Dick did not protest against her being served, but waited, confident of the result, until she had had her four of gin, and came reeling out into his arms. Shaking herself free she stared at him, and when he was fully recognized, cursed him for his damned interference. But it could not last much longer. She could now scarcely stand on her legs, and, much to her husband's relief, after staggering a few yards further, she fell helplessly on the pavement.

Calling a cab, he bundled her into it and drove away.

CHAPTER XXVII

OH, Dick dear! what did I do yesterday? Do tell me? Was I very violent?"

"What is the use of going over that again? It is over now. We must pack up our things and get out of this house."

"But won't the landlady let us stay? Oh, what shall I do? It is I who am getting you turned out of the house. It is my fault; I know it is; it is my fault."

"It doesn't matter whose fault it is. You had better get up and get dressed."

"But I can't—I can't. I feel so ill. Oh, my head! my head!"

"I dare say you do feel ill; it would be astonishing if you didn't."

"But I never will again. Oh, that I promise you. But do tell me what I did; I don't quite remember. Did I not go down to the theatre?"

"You did."

"And I disgraced you? Oh, no! don't say that I disgraced you! And those wounds on your face—the sticking-plaster; I didn't do that; don't tell me that I did that; I love you too much."

"If you love me you have a queer way of showing it, that's all I can say."

"Oh yes! I do love you better than anything in the world; better than my very life. Oh, Dick! don't say I don't love you; don't—don't!"

"I don't say anything, I only ask you to get up. We have to be out of this by twelve o'clock."

"Yes, and through my fault! through my fault. But not all my fault. You said just now that you did not believe I loved you. Well, do you think if it were not love I would do all I do? It is love of you that is killing me—that is driving me to my ruin. Yes, you needn't laugh;

it is as I say. It maddens me to think that you are looking at other women. I can't control myself when I think you are speaking to one. It is that that drives me to drink, for you are, I know, surrounded by them all day long; and you never once think of me. It is that that is killing me; it is that that drives me to drink. Ah! yes, it is; you mustn't smile. All I say is, I assure you, the truth and no more than the truth; and if you could only know how much I love you you might pity me—you might forgive. It is not all my fault; it was finding out about Mrs. Forest that drove me to desperation. I could not stand it. My brain was on fire, and I had to drink."

"And how did you find out about Mrs. Forest?"

"Oh! I was told it; I was told it. What does it matter? My head is splitting. I am the wretchedest woman alive. Oh! don't tease me now! I want you to forgive me if you can, and I'll promise never to drink again."

"Well, whoever told you about Mrs. Forest told you a lie. There is, I swear, nothing between her and me. She is a writer, a woman of talent, and she wants me to help her to bring out her pieces, that is all. And by kicking up rows, and coming down to the theatre drunk, you are only taking the bread out of our mouths. I am now in a very good position, and shall hold it if you don't contrive—and you are doing your very best—to kick me out of it."

"Oh, Dick! how can you talk to me so? it is unkind of you. How can you think that I would do anything to injure you?"

"Well, it is useless to discuss the question any further. We have to get out of this place by twelve o'clock, and it is eleven now."

This conversation took place the morning after the scene at rehearsal. Kate was in bed; Dick sat on a chair, staring vaguely at a portmanteau which lay gaping in the middle of the floor. He looked very weary, and often an expression of hopelessness clouded his face.

"For goodness' sake get up, Kate. There is no use lying there complaining of me, yourself, and everything else."

"Well, there's no use being cross with me. I do feel so ill, so ill. My head seems as if it were splitting."

"But, splitting or not splitting, you'll have to get up," said Dick, losing patience.

But the only answer he got was a moan; and it was impossible to persuade her to leave the tossed, tumbled bedclothes until the landlady came upstairs, and warned them that it was half-past eleven, and that they must make haste. Then, staggering on to the floor, Kate sought for her stockings. The progress of dressing was awful to follow. Dirty, limp petticoats a week old were tied anyhow round her waist. Garters could not be found, and a piece of the lining of a dress was used instead. The dress was bundled on like a bag, and the boots were left unbuttoned.

"Well, I do pity a man who has a wife like that," said the landlady; "and he is so gentle, too, with her."

"Hussies like her always has nice husbands," said the maid-of-all-work. "It isn't like my poor sister, who has been beaten black and blue."

From Islington Dick took his wife to Holborn, to the house of a woman he knew, and who, he hoped, would view his wife's faults with a little more indulgence than their last landlady. It was most unpleasant to be turned out at such extremely short notice, no matter what the rights and wrongs of the case might be; and to guard against a repetition of the scene he resolved to make a little explanation in the parlor when Kate went up to the sitting-room to take off her bonnet. As he anticipated, Mrs. Stevens proved very docile. Many were the bland looks of sympathy, many were the speaking glances, which said as plainly as words, "Ah! yes, I understand; I have heard of such things. Of course, we must look after her, and hope for the best."

All this was very encouraging, and Kate herself was profuse in her promises of amendment. She was resolved never to touch liquor again. Come what may, she would never again let a drop pass her lips. The only thing she had to complain of was that she was a bit lonely sitting at home all day. She had no friends in London. She did not know where to go to, and at night the time seemed very long, indeed, waiting up for him—he never was home before half-past twelve. Would he see and get her an engage-

ment at some theatre? She didn't mind what she got to do. She only wanted something to occupy her time. Besides, she would be earning her bit, and in these hard times every little helps.

Dick promised to do what he could. He would that very day cut round and see if there was anything going; if so, he would let her know. But now he must positively be off. He had an appointment, and would miss it if he stayed a moment longer. And with a recommendation to her to cultivate the landlady's society, he rushed away.

Dick had said that he would look out for an engagement for his wife, because it was not in his nature to answer "No" to anything in the world. Had he been asked for a star out of the sky, he would undoubtedly have replied, "Certainly, I'll see what I can do for you." His present opinions concerning Kate amounted to nothing. He merely wished to keep her out of the way. She might reform or might not; on that point he could not speak; but to get her an engagement either at his own or any other theatre he hadn't the slightest intention. How did he know what row she might not kick up, and what she might not say about himself or Mrs. Forest? Besides, he really hadn't the time. He had now to cut down to see about the spangles on the ballet-girls' dresses, and at one o'clock he had an appointment with Mrs. Forest at the theatre. Fortunately, he told the old lady that he was married. She had nearly died of it, but he was not such a fool as to have risked the chance that any one else should tell her; it was better that it should have come from him. She had borne it better than he expected. Drunkenness was a famous excuse. No lady minded a drunken woman if she were kept out of the way. That was the principal thing—keep her out of the way.

Upon such lines ran Dick's thoughts, as, with a huge limp, he hurried away in the direction of the Strand, leaving Kate weak, helpless, and ill in the loneliness of their new lodgings. Her thoughts were now occupied solely with the problem how she was to cure herself of her vice. But as she considered the question, the bitterest remembrances fled shrieking over her poor desolated mind like mournful

winds across a heath. Among these, the loudest and chilliest was the memory of her child's death, and as she lay these long summer afternoons, weeping and sighing on her bed, she could see distinctly defined on a deep blue background every feature of its little pale face. It was all her fault that it had died; it was the fault of that accursed, that thrice accursed drink, that was ruining her, that was killing her. Who had taught her to like it? she could not remember; she fancied that it had begun in the dressing-rooms. But what did it matter where it had commenced, she would have to cure herself of the habit now. As the resolution formed itself in her mind, the taste of the spirit rose to her lips, and shuddering, she buried her face in the pillow. The warm burning flavors of brandy ravished her palate; the soft sweetnesses of the gin were as the appealing seductiveness of a youth's lips; and her whole nature seemed to sink, to fall away helplessly, as she strove to convince, to force it on herself that she would never know any of them again.

Then, there were hours when all sorts of cowardly, treacherous arguments insinuated themselves into her mind, and she suffered all the cruelties of indecision. It seemed as if the devils in hell were in league against her. Things and ideas of things grew strangely altered, until even her child's death, which above all else should have aided her to persevere in her resolutions, became one of the imposing forces against her. For why should she struggle? What did it matter what became of her? Dick, whom she loved better than anything in the world, cared for her no longer. Had her baby lived there would have been something for her to have lived for, but it had been taken from her, as everything had been taken from her, so why should she struggle? It was as if a darkened glass lay perpetually before her eyes, wherein she was forced not only to read, but absolutely to see, every scene of her past life, and the mirror being concave everything was distorted. Even her love of Dick grinned at her with mephistophelian grimace. What had it begun in? Meanness. What had it ended in? She closed her ears to the answer, but still the procession

of marionnettes went on, and shrill mechanical voices continued to cry in her ears the cost and the worth of all she had ever known. Everything was exhibited in cruel detail, in miserable separateness. It was as if a beautiful watch in all the wonder of its inviolate precision, had been suddenly shattered and the hidden wheels scattered under the eyes of the owner in meaningless confusion. So did her life now seem disjointed and broken. Often she strove to put some part back into the case from which it had fallen. But in vain. Kate Ede was the result of centuries of inherited customs and forms of thought, and when to this be added a touch of lightheadedness, so ordinary in character that, in the shop in Hanley, it had passed unperceived, it will be understood how little fitted she was to effect the psychological and even physical changes that her new life demanded. She was the woman that nature turns out of her workshop by the million, all of whom are capable of fulfilling the duties of life, provided the conditions in which they are placed, that have produced them, remain unaltered. They are like cheap Tottenham Court Road furniture, equal to an ordinary amount of wear and tear so long as the original atmosphere in which they were glued together is preserved; change this and they go to pieces. This is precisely what had happened in the case of Kate Ede. Not a whit worse was she than others of her kind, but one of those million chances of which our lives are made had drifted Mr. Lennox across her life. From the first moment he entered her house the whole temperature of her blood and brain had been altered. But the introduction of a passion into a character does not add to it any more than a gust of wind does to a landscape. Principles may be overthrown as trees may be blown down. Morals may be perverted as land-marks may be destroyed, but no new element of vitality or strength is gained in either case. It was so with Kate, but in this instance a deadlier disaster than a hurricane had occurred. It was as if a country had been gradually submerged by a great tide that after saturating and washing over it for years had slowly retired, leaving behind it only wastes of foul-smelling mudbanks and putrid reaches of slimy and decaying matter. So

much Bohemianism had done for Kate Lennox. The brackish ooze had penetrated her whole nature; it was heavy with it as a sponge that has just been soaked in the sea with brine. It was a sort of mental dissolution. Every sentiment in her was dead or sodden in drink; nothing human was left except an inordinate, an exaggerated love of her husband, which grew like a fungus out of all this psychical decay.

And perhaps the most painful part of all was the vivid consciousness she possessed of her own misfortunes, of her own failings. She knew very well that the scenes of violent jealousies she was constantly enacting only served to alienate her further from the man she loved, the man she adored; very well did she know that the passion that held her by the throat had disgraced and dishonored her, and was dragging her down to death. It was in this knowledge that the bitterest bitterness lay. For hours she would sit with tears running down her cheeks weeping at her misfortunes. But she was helpless. From afar she could see the demon watching her; often she tried to fly from him. Steadily he would steal nearer until she could feel a red hand laid upon her, and she would put on her bonnet and go out to have just "two penn'orth." Then with a wee drop more in a small bottle she would return home to brood over her wrongs. Wrongs she undoubtedly had; and tortured with suspicions of Mrs. Forest, she used to sit by her window until her brain positively reeled as it were with the fumes of suspicion. She suspected everybody of love designs on Dick, and in solitary sullenness she spent her time constructing elaborate plots and plans out of the most trivial incidents of ordinary life. In her brain, at once dazzled by drink and rendered nervous by long brooding, the smallest events became magnified and distorted. A word heedlessly spoken hours, perhaps days ago, would suddenly start into her memory, and then arguing upwards there seemed to be no conclusion too preposterous for her to arrive at, and working with such means it was not difficult for her to pick quarrels with whatever friends she had. Miss Leslie, who, although she thought Kate much changed, for old friendship's sake often came to see her, had for

some whimsical fancy been insulted and turned out of the house; Montgomery she would not speak to because she could not convince herself that it was not he who, for the furtherance of his own schemes, had introduced Mrs. Forest to her husband. The poor musician bore with her patiently, hoping always that she would go back to her old self; but as time went on she grew only more and more intractable and hard to bear with. The impression that she was a persecuted woman prevented her from realizing how terrible, nay, even ferocious, her temper had become. How it and drink, like twin sisters, had joined hands, and by their mutual assistance and encouragement the most diabolical scenes were arrived at. Yet between the hours of passion there were moments of peace and sweet affection.

She had a box in which she kept her souvenirs. They were a curious collection. A withered flower, a broken cigarette-holder, two or three old buttons that had fallen from his clothes, and a lock of hair. But it was underneath these that lay the prize of prizes—a string of false pearls. Never did she see this precious relic without trembling, and to put it round her neck for a few minutes after her lonely dinner when she was waiting for him to come home, charmed and softened her as nothing else did. It was a necklace she had to wear in a comedietta they had both played in, *The Lover's Knot*. Well did she remember the day they had gone out to buy it together; it had been one of the happiest in her life. But it was precisely the reaction caused by these moments of tenderness that was terrible to witness. Gradually from looks of dreamy happiness the face would become clouded, and as bitter thoughts of wrongs done her surged up in her mind, the tiny nostril would dilate and the upper lip contract, until the white canine tooth was visible. For ten minutes more she would remain, her hands grasping nervously at the arms of her chair: by that time the paroxysm would have obtained complete mastery over her, and with her brain deaf and cold as stone she would walk across the room to where the liquor was kept, and moodily sipping the gin-and-water, she would form plans as to how she would attack him when he arrived home. Hours and hours would pass first, but at

last, through the stillness of the night, she could hear his heavy footsteps. Then she would prepare for battle. These fights, which now never numbered fewer than three a week, always began in the same manner. Dick entered in his usual deliberate elephantine way; Kate made no sign until he was seated, but assuming then a air of indifference, if the quarrel was premeditated, she would ask him what the news was.

For many reasons this question was a difficult one to answer. To tell that he had been round to tea with one of the girls was clearly out of the question; to explain how he had wheedled Mrs. Forest into all sorts of theatrical follies was likewise not to be thought of as a subject of news, and as to making conversation out of the rest of the day's duties he really didn't see how he was to do it. Miss Howard had put out the entire procession by not listening to his instructions; Miss Adair, although she was playing the Brigand of the Ultramarine Mountains, had threatened to throw up her part if she were not allowed to wear her diamond earrings. The day had gone in deciding such questions; had passed in drilling those infernal girls, and what interest could there be in going through it all over again. Besides, he never knew how or where he might betray himself, and Kate was so quick in picking up the slightest word and twisting it into extraordinary meanings, that he really would prefer to talk about something else.

"I can't understand how you can have been out all day without having heard something. It is because you want to keep me shut up here and not let me know anything of your going-on; but I shall go down to the theatre to-morrow and have it out of you."

"My dear, I assure you that I was at the rehearsal all day. The girls don't know their music yet, and it puts me out in my stage arrangement. That is, I give you my word, all I heard or saw to-day. I have nothing to conceal from you."

"You are a liar, and you know you are!"

Blows and shrieks followed, and so it went on, often until the dawn began to break. Sometimes, perhaps, Kate would drink herself to sleep a little earlier, and, with a

sigh, Dick would put her to bed. These quarrels were of all sorts and kinds: and they differed widely, both in the violence indulged in and in their duration. There was only one thing that could be said, which was, that these fits of uncontrolled anger seemed to be passing the borderline, and to be drifting into a state of unbridled passion, of rage so limitless that to account for its unreason was possible in no other way but by supposing the patient to be insane. And in Kate's worst paroxysms there were all the symptoms of madness, for while she poured out her torrents of abuse she often foamed at the mouth, and she approached him with compressed lips and a virulent frown. Then she drew back her lips, especially the corners of the upper lip, and showed her teeth, aiming a vicious blow at him. And not unfrequently in these combats did Dick run close risks of carrying away with him something more than a mere scratch on the face; for being in these times entirely deprived of free-will, there was no object within reach, no matter how dangerous, that she would not catch up and use unhesitatingly as a weapon of offense. One night she narrowly escaped committing manslaughter. She had been waiting hours alone, and it was half-past eleven o'clock, and Dick had not yet come in. But long before this time she had worked herself into a fury of passion, and when he entered he saw at once what he had to expect. The only question was whether it would be a war of words or of blows, or a mixture of both. Stopping in her walk, she confronted him suddenly.

"What have you been doing out till this time of night? Amusing yourself with Mrs. Forest, I suppose. I shall pull that woman's nose off; I know I shall."

"I give you my word, my dear, that I have been the whole evening with Montgomery and Harding cutting the piece."

"Cutting the piece! And I should like to know why I'm not in that piece. I suppose it was you who kept me out of it. Oh, you beast! why did you ever have anything to do with me? It is you who are ruining me. Were it not for you, do you think I should be drinking? Not I—it was all your fault."

Dick made no attempt to answer these accusations, but throwing his hat aside, he let himself fall into a chair. He was very tired. Kate continued her march up and down the room for some moments in silence, but he could see from the twitching of her face and the swinging of her arms that the storm was bound to burst soon. Presently she said—

"You go and get me something to drink; I've had nothing all this evening."

"Oh, Kate dear! I beg of——"

"Oh, you won't, won't you? We'll see about that," she answered as she looked around the room for the heaviest object she could conveniently throw at him.

Seeing how useless it would be to attempt to contradict her in her present mood, Dick, rising to his feet, said hurriedly:

"Now there is no use in getting into a passion, Kate. I'll go, I'll go."

"You'd better, I can tell you."

"What shall I get, then?"

"Get me half-a-pint of gin, and be quick about it—I'm dying of thirst."

Even Dick, accustomed as he was now to these scenes, could not repress a look in which there was at once mingled pity, astonishment, and fear, so absolutely demoniacal did this little woman, her dark complexion gone to a dull greenish pallor, seem as she raved under the watery light of the lodging-house gas. Involuntarily he called to mind the mild-eyed workwoman he had known in the linen-draper's shop in Hanley, and asked himself if it were possible that she and this raging creature, more like a tiger in her passion than a human being, were one and the same person? The question presented itself confusedly, stupidly, to his mind, and little attraction as psychological analysis had for him, he could not choose but wonder. But another scream came, bidding him make haste, or it would be worse for him. He bent his head and went to fetch the gin.

In the meantime Kate's fury leaped, crackled, and burnt with the fierceness of a house in the throes of conflagration, and in the smoke-cloud of hatred which enveloped her only

fragments of ideas and sensations flashed like falling sparks, intense and as transient, through her mind. Up and down the room she walked swinging her arms, only hesitating, as a fire will in the vacuum it has created, for some new object whereon to wreak new fury. Suddenly it struck her that Dick had been too long away—that he was keeping her waiting on purpose. Then, grinding her teeth, she muttered—

"Oh, the beast! Would he—would he keep me waiting, and since nine this morning I have been alone."

In an instant her resolve was taken. It came to her like the instinct of revenge to an animal, sullenly, obtusely. No consideration was given, but, seizing a large stick, the handle of a brush that happened to have been broken, she stationed herself at the top of the landing. A feverish tremor agitated her as she waited in the semi-darkness of the stairs. At last, however, she heard the door open, and Dick came up slowly with his usual heavy tread. Making neither sign nor stir, she allowed him to get past her, and then, raising the brush-handle, she landed him one across the back. The poor man uttered a long cry, and the crash of broken glass was heard.

"What did you hit me like that for?" he cried, holding himself with both hands.

"You beast, you! I'll teach you to keep me waiting. You would, would you! Do you want another? Go into the sitting-room."

Dick obeyed humbly and in silence. His only hope was that the landlady had not been woke up, and he felt uneasily at his pockets, through which he could feel the gin dripping down his legs.

"Well, have you brought the drink I sent you for? Where is it?"

"Well," replied Dick, desirous of conciliating at any price, "it was in my pocket, but when you hit me with that stick you broke it."

"I broke it?" cried Kate, her eyes glistening with fire.

"Yes, dear, you did; it wasn't my fault."

"Wasn't your fault! Oh, you horrid wretch! you put it there on purpose that I should break it."

"Oh! now really, Kate," he cried, shocked by the illogicalness of the accusation, "how could I know that you were going to hit me there?"

"I don't know and I don't care; what's that to me? But what I am sure of is that you always want to spite me, that you hate me, that you would wish to see me dead, so that you might marry Mrs. Forest."

"I can't think how you can say such things. I have often told you that Mrs. Forest and I——"

"Oh! don't bother me. I am not such a fool. I know she keeps you, and she will have to pay me a drink to-night. Go and get another bottle of gin; and mind you pay for it with the money she gave you to-day. Yes, she shall stand me a drink to-night!"

"I give you my word I haven't another penny-piece upon me; it is just the accident——"

But Dick did not get time to finish the sentence; he was interrupted by a heavy blow across the face, and like a panther that has tasted blood, she rushed at him again, screaming all the while, "Oh! you have no money. You liar! you liar! So you would make me believe that she does not give you money, that you have no money of hers in your pocket. You would keep it all for yourself; but you sha'n't, no, you sha'n't, for I will tear it from you and throw it in your face! Oh, that filthy money! that filthy money!"

The patience with which he bore with her was truly angelic. With one stroke he might have easily felled her to the ground, but he contented himself with merely warding off the blows she aimed at him. This, from his great height and strength, he was easily able to do, and she struck at him with her little womanish arms as she might against a door.

"Take down your hands," she screamed, exasperated to a last degree. "You would strike me, would you? You beast! I know you would."

Her rage had now reached its height. Showing her clenched teeth, she foamed at the mouth, the bloodshot eyes protruded from their sockets, and her voice grew more and more harsh and discordant. But although the excited brain gave strength to the muscles and energy to the will, un-

armed she could do nothing against Dick, and suddenly becoming conscious of this she rushed to the fireplace and seized the poker. With one sweep of the arm she cleared the mantel-board, and as she advanced round the table, brandishing her weapon, the mirror come in for a tremendous blow; but, heedless of the shattered glass, she followed in pursuit of Dick, who continued to defend himself dexterously with a chair. How long this combat might have lasted it is difficult to say, had not his attention, when Kate was using the poker by turns as spear and sabre, been interrupted by the view of the landlady's face at the door; and so touched was he by the woman's dismay when she looked upon her broken furniture, that he forgot to guard himself from the poker. Kate, taking advantage of the occasion, whirled the weapon round her head. He saw it descending in time, and half warded off the blow; but it came down with awful force on the forearm, and glancing off, inflicted a severe scalp wound. The landlady screamed "Murder!" and Dick, seeing that matters had come to a crisis, closed in upon his wife, and undeterred by yells and struggles, pinioned her and forced her into a chair.

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear! You are all bleeding, sir," cried the landlady: "she has nearly killed you."

"Never mind me. But what are we to do? I think she has gone mad this time."

"That's what I think," said the landlady, trying to make herself heard above Kate's shrieks.

"Well, then, go and fetch a doctor, and let's hear what he has to say," replied Dick, as he changed his grip on Kate's arms, for in a desperate struggle she had nearly succeeded in wrenching herself free. The landlady retreated precipitately towards the door.

"Well, will you go?"

"Yes, yes, I'll run at once."

"You had better," yelled the mad woman after her. "I'll give it to you! Let me go! let me go, will you?"

But Dick never ceased his hold of her, and the blood dripped upon her trickling in large drops into her ears, and down into her neck and bosom.

"You are spitting on me, you beast! You filthy beast!

I'll pay you out for this." Then, perceiving that it was blood, the intonation of her voice changed, and in terror she screamed, "Murder! murder! He is murdering me! Is there no one here to save me."

The minutes seemed like eternities. Dick felt himself growing faint, and should he lose his power over her before the doctor arrived, the consequences might be fatal to himself, so he struggled with her for very life.

At last the door was opened, and a man walked, tripping in so doing over a piece of the broken mirror, into the room. It was the doctor, and accustomed as he was to betray surprise at nothing, he could, nevertheless, not repress a look of horror on catching sight of the scene around him.

The apartment, to begin with, was almost dismantled; chairs lay backless about the floor amid china shepherdesses and toreadors; pictures were thrown over the sofa, and a huge pile of wax fruit—apples and purple grapes—was partially reflected in a large piece of mirror that had fallen across the hearthrug.

"Come, help me to hold her," said Dick, raising his blood-stained face.

The doctor with a quick movement took possession of Kate's arms. "Give me a sheet from the next room; I'll soon make her fast."

The threat of being tied had its effect. Kate became quieter, and after some trouble they succeeded in carrying her into the next room and laying her on the bed. There she rolled convulsively, beating the pillows with her arms. The landlady then stationed herself at the door to give notice of any further manifestation of fury, whilst Dick explained the circumstances of the case to the doctor.

After a short consultation, he agreed to sign an order declaring that in his opinion Mrs. Lennox was a dangerous lunatic.

"Will that be enough," said Dick, "to place her in an asylum?"

"No, you will have to get the opinion of another doctor."

The possibility of being able to get rid of his wife was to him like the sudden dawning of a new life, and dazzled

with joy and delight keener than anything he had known before, Dick rushed off, bleeding, haggard, wild-looking as he was, to seek for another doctor who would concur in the judgment of the first. He could have knelt down and kissed that man's hand. Was it possible, he asked himself, to see Kate in her present position, and say conscientiously that she was a person who could be safely trusted with her liberty? He thought not, and to his great joy this view was taken by the second authority consulted, and having placed his wife under lock and key, Dick lay down to rest a happier man than he had been for many a day. The principal question in his mind was, of course, as to the means he should adopt to place her in the asylum. Force was not to be thought of; persuasion was in the first instance to be tried. So far he was decided, but as to the arguments he should advance to induce her to give up her liberty he knew nothing, nor did he attempt to formulate any scheme, and when he entered the sitting-room next morning he relied more on the hope of finding her repentant, and appealing to and working on her feelings of remorse than anything else. "The whole thing," as he put it, "depended upon the humor he should find her in."

In a dreadful state of *déshabillé*, with stains of blood still upon her face, Kate sat weeping bitterly as a Magdalen, amid the broken furniture.

"Oh, Dick! Dick! What have I done? What have I done? Can you ever forgive me?" she said, throwing herself at his feet. "I am so sorry. I am so miserable. But it was not I who did all this. Tell me, Dick, tell me, for I do not remember, it is all confused in my head—was I very violent?"

"Well, my dear," said Dick, casting an involuntary glance round the room as he searched for a chair that would be safe for him to sit on, "there is no use in going over that subject again. It is a great pity that you cannot do without the drink."

"I know it! I know it! but I cannot help it. To sit here all those hours alone, and know that you are with other women—it is that that maddens me. Oh, why do you do it?"

"Don't let us talk about that, or you will exeite yourself again."

"Oh, no, I sha'n't. I feel too ill and too wretched."

To this Dick made no answer. He sat with his hands on his fat knees and the big felt crushed over his eyes. This was purposely arranged so, for the production of his wounds was to be the "big effect," and he fervidly hoped they would decide the situation.

"But tell me, Dick—Dick, tell me—was I very bad? I don't know what came over me, but I think I must have felt what the mad feel. I could not—no, I could not—restrain myself. I really couldn't. But tell me—tell me, Dick—did I strike you? I remember something—yes, I remember that the doctor came, at least I think it was a doctor, but it is all confused in my head. Tell me, what did he say?"

"He said that if you did not take care something very serious would happen."

"Yes, yes, I know," sobbed Kate; "I am making your life miserable, yet I love you better than anything in the world. It is very horrible, very terrible, and yet I can't help myself."

"I know, that's just what the doctor said;" and after pausing so as to give his words time to strike well home he took off his hat and showed the linen bandages.

The effect was magical. With eyes staring with horror Kate rose to her feet.

"Oh! oh! oh!" she exclaimed, pressing her hands to her face; then, withdrawing them, she looked round the room anxiously, wildly, seeking unconsciously for the weapon she had used. But the very action forced her to realize the truth, and in a lightning instant she saw that she had attempted her husband's life.

"Dick! Dick!" she screamed, "is it possible that it was I who did that? Ah! yes, I remember I took the—" She could not finish the sentence for shame.

"Well, dear," said Dick, as cautiously as a man who was playing dice with his life at stake, "it was not your fault."

Not understanding she looked at him, and repeated the words after him, "Not my fault?"

He felt that the slightest imprudence of phrase might ruin him; and, thinking that he had better be confidential, he said, "Well dear, it was not your fault. You hadn't the least idea of what you were doing—at least the doctor said so; but he also said that you would get well if you took care of yourself."

A gray cloud passed over Kate's face, and she asked calmly, but with intense emotion, "Dick, tell me—I beseech of you tell me truly what he said. Did he say that I was mad?"

Without answering this too direct question, Dick told in brief phrases how she had commenced by breaking the furniture, and then how she had caught up the poker, swearing she would kill him; and resolved to bend her to his wishes, he insisted that it was only by the merest chance he had escaped with his life. The conversation was interrupted by sobs and protestations, and Kate allowed her arms to fall across Dick's knees in picturesque movements full of a grand despair.

With a thousand kind words he soothed, he consoled; over and over again he hinted that it was not her fault, venturing even to insinuate that she was not responsible for her actions.

"Then I am really downright mad?" said Kate, raising her tear-stained face from her arms. "Did the doctor say so?"

This was by far too direct a question for Dick to answer, and he preferred to equivocate.

"Well, my dear—mad? He didn't say that you were always mad, but he said you were liable to fits, and that if you didn't take care those fits would grow upon you, and you would become——"

Then he hesitated as he always did before a direct statement.

"But what did he say I must do to get well?"

"He advised, he suggested, that you should go and live in some place where you would not be able to get hold of any liquor; some place, you know, where you would be looked after."

"You mean a madhouse. Oh, Dick! you wouldn't put me in a madhouse, would you?"

"Of course, my dear, I would not put you anywhere where you did not like to go; but he said nothing about a madhouse."

"What did he say, then?"

"He spoke merely of one of those houses which are under medical supervision, and where any one can go and live for a time; a kind of hospital, you know."

The argument was continued for an hour or more. Weeping, Kate protested against being locked up as a mad woman; while he, conscious of the strong hold he had over her, reminded her in a thousand ways of the terrible danger she ran of awakening one morning to find herself a murderess. Yet it is difficult, no matter how irrefutable the reasons advanced may be, to persuade anyone to voluntarily enter a lunatic asylum; and it was not until Dick on one side skilfully threatened her with separation, and tempted her on the other with the hope of being cured of her vice and living with him happily ever afterwards, that she consented to enter Dr. —'s private asylum, Craven street, Bloomsbury. But even then the battle was not won, for when he suggested going off there at once, he very nearly brought another fit of passion down on his head. It was only the extreme lassitude and debility produced from the excesses of last night that saved him. She was now as helpless, as limp, as a wet chicken.

"Oh, Dick, dear! if you only knew how I love you! I would give my last drop of blood to save you from harm."

"I know you would, dear; it is the fault of that confounded drink," he answered, his heart tense with the hope of being rid of her. Then the packing began. Kate, sitting disconsolate on the sofa, watched Dick folding up her dresses and petticoats. It seemed to her that everything had ended, and wearily she collected the pearls which had been scattered, in last night's skirmishing, from their string. But some had been trodden on, others were lost. Only about half the original number could be found, and this accident appeared to her to be infinitely sad, and to foretell still further unhappiness.

The drive to the asylum in the cab was also very piteous. Shaken with nervousness and lassitude, Kate cried and wrung her hands. Dick sat next her, huge, kind, and indifferent, even as the world itself.

But you will come and see me? You promise me that you will come—that you will come very often?"

"Yes, dear, I'll come two or three times a week; but I hope that you'll be well soon—very soon."

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE hope Dick thus kindly expressed, that his wife would soon be well enough to return to him, was, of course, neither more nor less than a lie—a simple and unadulterated untruth. Fondly he looked upon the house in Bloomsbury as the panacea of all his woes, and fervidly he prayed that she would never cross its doors again. But in this he was quickly and cruelly disappointed. Before two days were over—two days that appeared to him heaven, so blissful was their calm—he received a letter from the asylum, saying that Mrs. Lennox was not in the least insane, and would have to be discharged. The letter slipped from him, his head sank on his arm, and he remained prostrate, stunned, dizzy, like one who has received a violent blow on the head. Very soon after, Kate entered the room. He raised his head and looked at her. Interpreting that look at once, she said, and in an intonation of voice that was full of supreme sorrow—

"Well, Dick, I see you are very sorry to have me back again."

The simple words took an awful importance in the situation. It was like the cry of the chorus in the Greek tragedy against the mystery and inflexibility of fate.

Our lives run in grooves; we get into one and we follow it out to the end. And the man answered just what might have been expected he would have answered.

"I don't know that I am, dear; if you would not give way to those fits of jealousy we might get on all right."

For the word drunkenness, jealousy was as usual substituted. And why? Because he could not bring himself to say anything that would hurt her feelings.

Kate threw herself on her knees; she took his hand in hers, she leaned her face against his, and in brief, passionate phrases she promised everything she could for the moment

think of. She vowed above all that she never would touch a drop of gin again. Oh! it was that that was the ruin of her. Had it not been for that, they might be happy now as they were long ago at Blackpool, and at Manchester where their child was born. Oh, that poor child! Had it lived, had it only lived, she would not be what she was now. Yes, yes, it was better to admit the truth; she had neglected it, and it was drink and those love stories that had made her a bad mother, as she was now a bad wife. She was not afraid, although it nearly broke her heart to confess these things; but, as the proverb said, "Better late than never," and she was determined to turn over a new leaf. Never again would she touch a drop of gin. Ah! that was the principal thing. He did not believe her? Well, she did not blame him, for she had broken her promise so many times; but this time was not like the other times, and he must—it would be cruel of him not to believe her. Yes, yes, she had been fearfully wicked from the very first; but there was no use talking of that, and she was determined to prove herself a good wife, at least to one man. The other she didn't love, but Dick she did. Yes, with a love that was more than anything she could explain.

Dick's face expressed that on this point he had no doubt whatever. Indeed, it was the truth of her statement that he seemed to deplore, and reverting to his original idea he said:—

"Yes, my dear, but those jealous fits are terrible. You know I must look after my business, and by going down to the theatre and kicking up a row with me about Mrs. Forest you are only taking the bread out of my mouth."

"I know, Dick, I know," cried Kate passionately; "but I promise you that I never will again. You may go where you please, and do what you please, I will never say a word to you again; I know it is no use."

In his heart of hearts Dick did not believe she would ever again be able to control her temper, but knowing well that the expression of such an opinion would only excite her, he, although unable to persuade himself that there was much hope of peace for him in the future, as a weary packman his pack, as a captured convict his chains, took up

the now almost unbearable fetters of a drunken married life, resigned to trudge a little farther along the road that extended its apparently endless and horrible length before him.

Nevertheless, for many days Kate tried hard to keep her promises; for more than a fortnight she was as nice and as quiet as a man might wish a woman to be, until even sceptical Dick began to lull himself with false hopes of reformation. One evening, however, he noticed that she looked more sullen than usual, that her eyes dropped as if —the thought struck him hard—she had been drinking. When once women give way there is no stopping them; and then followed a whole month of a life so wild that it can only be compared to a lurid and fearful storm of wind and lightning. Not a single day passed without some scene of violence. On one occasion she ran at him with a knife, and he had only just time to ward off the blow. The house rang with shrieks and cries of all sorts. They were driven from one lodging house to another. Everything was pawned—trousers, dresses, hats, boots, shoes, her own as well as his. It was at once comic and pitiful to see Dick, with one of the tails of his coat lost in a scrimmage, talking at three o'clock in the morning to the dispassionate policeman, whilst from the top windows the high treble voice of a woman disturbed the sullen tranquillity of the London night. There were times, of course, between these paroxysms of fury when she grew repentant and begged of her husband to forgive her. But there was no help for her now. The latent germ of hysteria that the life of quietude and work that she had led with Ralph Ede had kept in check, the life of excitement and dissipation she had led with Dick Lennox had developed, until the disease had culminated in drink, and recovery seemed hopeless. Latterly, too, great physical changes had been wrought in her. Her plump, pigeon-like figure had grown thin and almost angular. She suffered at times terribly from want of rest, and towards morning would awake screaming from the most terrible nightmares. Food she could not touch except after drink, and her nervous system was terribly deranged; it was as if a quantity of bell-wires had got so

entangled and twisted that to touch them was impossible without awakening a jangle, and always the peal came from where you least expected it. But amid the ever-increasing number of exciting influences, Dick remained the most ruinous; now even to see him was sufficient to set her trembling with passion, or, to speak more correctly, acute nervous excitement. The very love she bore for the man was, it seemed, the cause of the disease—as it were, the battery whence all these terribly hysterical storms proceeded. In her sober moments, or rather in her calm moments—for now passion and drunkenness had become so inextricably mixed that it was impossible to distinguish where one began and the other ended—no one deplored more than she did the utter ungovernableness of her temper; but of resistance to it she could offer no more than a leaf does to the blast that bears it away. And yet Dick continued with her—continued to allow himself to be beaten, scratched, torn to pieces almost as he would be by a wild beast. Human nature can habituate itself even to pain, and it was so with him. He knew that his present life was as a Nessus shirt on his back, and yet he couldn't make up his mind to have done with it. In the first place, he pitied his wife; in the second, he did not know how to leave her; and it was not until after another row with Kate for having been down to the theatre that he summoned up courage to walk out of the house with a fixed determination never again to return. Kate at the time was too tipsy to pay much attention to the announcement he made to her as he left the room. Besides, "Wolf!" had been cried so often that it had now lost its terror in her ears, and it was not until next day that she began to experience any very certain fear that Dick and she had at last parted forever. But when, with a clammy, thirsty mouth, she sat rocking herself wearily, and the long idleness of the morning hours became haunted with irritating remembrances of her shameful conduct, of the cruel and abominable life she led the man she loved, that the black gulf of eternal separation became, as it were, etched upon her mind; and she heard the cold depths reverberating with vain words and foolish prayers. Then her thin

hands trembled on her black dress, and waves of shivering passed over her. Involuntarily she thought that a little brandy might give her strength, and as soon hated herself for the thought. It was brandy that had brought her to this. She would never touch it again. But Dick had not left her forever; he would come back to her; she could not live without him. It was terrible! She would go to him, and on her knees beg his pardon for all she had done. He would forgive her; he must forgive her. Such were the fugitive thoughts that flashed through Kate's mind as she hurried to and fro, seeking for her bonnet and shawl. She would go down to the theatre and find him; there she would be sure to hear news of him, she said, as she strove to brush away the mist that obscured her eyes. She could see nothing; things seemed to change their places, and she was forced to cling to any piece of furniture within reach, so terrible were the palpitations of her heart. There at last, however, subsided, and by walking very slowly she contrived to reach the stage-door of the Opera Comique, feeling very weak and ill.

"Is Mr. Lennox in?" she asked, at the same time trying to look conciliatingly at the hard-faced hall-keeper.

"No, ma'am, he ain't," was the reply.

"Who attended the rehearsal to-day, then?"

"There was no rehearsal to-day, ma'am—leastways, Mr. Lennox dismissed the rehearsal at half-past twelve."

"And why?"

"Ah! that I cannot tell you."

"Could you tell me where Mr. Lennox would be likely to be found?"

"Indeed I could not, ma'am; I believe he's gone into the country."

"Gone into the country!" echoed Kate.

"But may I ask, ma'am, if you be Mrs. Lennox? because if you be, Mr. Lennox left a letter to be given to you in case you called."

Her eyes brightened at the idea of a letter. To know the worst would be better than a horrible uncertainty, and she said eagerly—

"Yes, I am Mrs. Lennox; give me the letter."

The hall-keeper handed it to her, and she walked out of the narrow passage into the street, so as to be free from observation. With anxious fingers she tore open the ill-shapen, commercial-looking enevelope, and read,

"My Dear Kate,—

"It must be now as clear to you as it is to me that it is quite impossible for us to go on living together. There is no use in our again discussing the whys and the wherefores; we had much better accept the facts of the case in silence, and mutually save each other the pain of trying to alter what cannot be altered.

"I have arranged to allow you two pounds a week. This sum will be paid to you every Saturday, by applying to Messrs. Jackson & Co., Solicitors, Arundel Street, Strand.

"Yours very affectionately,

"Richard Lennox."

Mechanically Kate repeated the last words, and she walked gloomily through the glare of the day. A terrible sense of loneliness, of desolation, was created in her heart. For her the world seemed to have ended, and she saw the streets and passers-by with the same vague, irresponsible gaze as a solitary figure would the universal ruin caused by an earthquake. Enwrapped in a winding-sheet of sorrow, she seemed to be walking alone in a dark dream. She had no friends, no occupation, no interest of any kind in life. Everything had slipped from her, and she shivered with a sense of nakedness, of moral destitution. Nothing was left to her, and yet she felt, she lived, she was conscious. Oh yes, horribly conscious. And that was the worst; and she asked herself why she could not pass out of sight, out of hearing and feeling of all the crying misery with which she was surrounded.

For the moment hope had deserted her. She did not think of being reconciled to her husband, but abandoned herself feebly to the presentiment that she would never see him again. No thought was figurate or determinate, and in a state of emotivé somnambulism she walked through the crowds. Suddenly she was startled from her dreams by hearing a voice calling after her, "Kate! Kate! —Mrs. Lennox!"

It was Montgomery.

"I am so glad to have met you—so glad, indeed, for we have not seen much of each other. I don't know how it was, but somehow it seemed to me that Dick did not want me to go and see you. I never could make out why, for he couldn't have been jealous of me," he added a little bitterly. "But perhaps you have not heard that it is all up as regards my piece at the Opera Comique," he continued, not noticing Kate's dejection in his excitement.

"No, I haven't heard," she answered mechanically.

"It doesn't matter much, though, for I have just been down to the Gayety, and pretty well settled that it is to be done in Manchester, at the Prince's; so you see I don't let the grass grow under my feet, for my row with Mrs. Forest only occurred this morning. But what's the matter, Kate? what has happened?"

"Oh, nothing, nothing. Tell me about Mrs. Forest first; I want to know."

"Well, it is the funniest thing you ever heard in your life: but you won't tell Dick, because he forbade me ever to speak to you about Mrs. Forest—not that there is anything but business between them; that I swear to you. But do tell me, Kate, what is the matter? I never saw you look so sad in my life. Have you had any bad news?"

"No, no. Tell me about Mrs. Forest and your piece; I want to hear," she exclaimed excitedly.

"Well, this is it," said Montgomery, who saw in a glance that she was not to be contradicted, and that he had better get on with his story. "In the first place, you know that the old creature has gone in for writing librettos herself, and has finished one about Buddhism. You never saw such a thing in your life; the opening chorus is fifty lines long, and she won't cut one; but I'll tell you about that after. Well, I was to get one hundred for setting this blessed production to music, and it was to follow my own piece, which was in rehearsal. Well, like a great fool, I was explaining to Dubois the bosh I was writing by the yard for this infernal opera of hers. I couldn't help it; she wouldn't take advice on any point. She has written the song of the Sun-god in hexameters. I don't know what

hexameters are, but I would as soon set Bradshaw—leaving St. Pancras nine twenty-five, arriving at—ha! ha! ha! —with a puff, puff accompaniment on the trombone."

"For goodness sake don't torture me; go on with the story," cried Kate.

"Well, I was explaining all this," said Montgomery, suddenly growing serious, "when out she darted from behing the other wing. I never knew she was there. She called me a thief, and said she would not have me another five minutes in her theatre. Monti, the Italian composer, was sent for. I was shoved out, bag and baggage, and there will be no more rehearsals till the new music is ready. That's all."

"I am very sorry for you—very sorry," said Kate very quietly, and she raised her hand to brush away a tear.

"Oh, I don't care; I'd sooner have the piece done in Manchester. Of course it is a bore, losing a hundred pounds. But, oh, Kate! do tell me what's the matter; you know you can confide in me; you know I am your friend."

At these kind words the cold deadly grief that encircled Kate's heart like a band of steel melted, and she wept profusely. Drawing her arm into his, Montgomery pleaded and begged to be told the reason of these tears; but she could make no answer, and, with a passionate gesture, she pressed Dick's letter into his hand. He read it at a glance, and then hesitated, unable to make up his mind as to what he should do. No words seemed to him adequate wherewith to console her, and she was sobbing so bitterly that it was beginning to attract attention in the streets. They walked on without speaking for a few yards, Kate leaning upon Montgomery until a hackney coachman, guessing that something was wrong, signed to them with his whip.

"Where are you living, dear?"

Kate told him with some difficulty, and having directed the driver, he lapsed again into considering what course he should adopt. He was leaving London for Manchester by the six-thirty express. To put off the journey was impossible; Dick had promised to meet him there. It was

now three o'clock. He had therefore, three hours to spend with Kate—with the woman whom he had loved steadfastly throughout a loveless life. He had no word of blame for Dick; he had heard stories that had made his blood run cold; and yet, and even now, knowing her faults as he did, had it been possible, he would have opened his arms, and crying through the fervor of years of waiting, said to her, "Yes, I will believe in you; believe in me and you shall be happy." There had never been a secret between them; their souls had been forever as if in communication; and the love, unacknowledged in words, had long been as sunlight and moonlight, lighting the spaces of their dream-life. To the woman it had been as a distant star whose pale light was in hours of vexation a presage of quietude; to the man it seemed as a far Elysium radiant with sweet longing, large hopes that waxed but never waned, and where the sweet breezes of eternal felicitude blew in musical cadence.

And yet he was deceived in nothing. He knew now as he had known before, that although this dream might haunt him forever, he should never hold it in his arms nor press it to his lips; and in the midst of this surging tide of misery there arose a desire that, glad in its own anguish, bade him increase the bitterness of these last hours by making a confession of his suffering;—and, exulting savagely in the martyrdom he was preparing for himself, he said—

"You know, Kate—I know you must know—you must have guessed that I care for you. I may as well tell you the truth now—you are the only woman I ever loved."

"Yes," she said, "I always thought you cared for me. You have been very kind—oh! very kind, and I often think of it. Ah! everybody has, all my life long, been very good to me; it is I alone who am to blame, who am in fault. I have, I know I have, been very wicked, and I don't know why. I did not mean it; I know I didn't, for I am not at heart a wicked woman. I suppose things must have gone against me; that's about all."

Montgomery pushed his glasses higher on his nose; his face grew ludicrous in its expression of sorrow; but it

mattered little now whether he were handsome or ugly. After a long silence, he said:

"I have often thought that had you met me before you knew Dick, things might have been different. We should have got on better, although you might never have loved me so well."

Kate raised her eyes, and she said:

"No one will ever know how I loved, how I still love that man. Oftentimes I think that had I loved him less I should have been a better wife. He loved me, I think, but it was not the love I dreamed of. Like you, I was always sentimental, and Dick never cared for that sort of thing."

"I think I should have understood you better," said Montgomery; and the conversation came to a pause. A vision of the life of devotion spent at the feet of an ideal lover, that life of sacrifice and tenderness which had been her dream, and which she had so utterly failed to attain, again rose up to tantalize her like a glittering mirage; and she could not help wondering whether, if she had chosen this other man, she would have realized this beautiful, this wonderful might-have-been.

"But I suppose you will make it up with Dick," said Montgomery somewhat harshly.

Kate awoke from her reverie with a start, and answered sorrowfully that she did not know, that she was afraid Dick would never forgive her again.

"I do not remember if I told you that I am going to see him in Manchester; he promised to go up there to make some arrangements about my piece."

"No, you did not tell me."

"Well, I will speak to him. I will tell him I have seen you. I fancy I shall be able to make it all right," he added, with a feeble smile.

"Oh! how good you are—how good you are," cried Kate, clasping her hands. "If he will only forgive me once again. I'll promise, I'll swear to him never to—to——"

Here Kate stopped abashed, and burying her face in her hands, she wept bitterly. The tenderness, the melancholy serenity of their interview, had somehow suddenly come

to an end. Each was too much occupied with his or her thoughts to talk much, and the effort to find phrases grew more and more irritating. Both were very sad, and although they sighed when the clock struck the hour of farewell, they felt that to pass from one pain to another was in itself an assuagement. Kate accompanied Montgomery to the station. He seemed to her to be out of temper; she to him to be farther away than ever. The explanation that had taken place between them, had, if not broken, at least altered the old bonds of sympathy, without creating new ones; and they were discontented, even like children who remember for the first time that today is not yesterday.

They felt lonely watching the parallel lines of platforms; and when Montgomery waved his hand for the last time, and the train rolled into the luminous arch of sky that lay beyond the glass roofing, Kate turned away overpowered by grief and cruel recollections. When she got home, the solitude of her room became unbearable; she wanted someone to see, someone to console her. She had a few shillings in her pocket, but she remembered her resolutions, and for some time resented the imperious clutch of the temptation. But the sorrow that hung about her, that penetrated like a corrosive acid into the very marrow of her bones, grew momentarily more burning, more endurable. Twenty times she tried to wrench it out of her heart. The landlady brought her up some tea: she could not drink it: it tasted like soapsuds in her mouth. Then, knowing well what the results would be, she resolved to go out for a walk.

Next day she was ill, and, to pull herself together, it was necessary to have a drink. It would not do to look too great a sight in the solicitor's office where Dick had told her in his letter to go to get her money. There she found not two, but five, pounds awaiting her, and this enabled her to keep up a state of semi-intoxication until the end of the week. She at last woke up almost speechless, suffering terribly from palpitation of the heart. Fortunately, the bell-rope was at hand. Constant waves of shivering passed over her, and when the landlady came to her bed-

side, she nearly lost her balance and fell to the ground, so strenuously did Kate lean and cling to her for support. The woman was frightened at the appearance her lodger presented. The large eyes were hollow and lustreless, and the plump olive complexion was now thin and dragged, and full of dirty yellow tints. After gasping painfully for some moments, Kate muttered:

"Oh, oh! I am afraid I am dying. I am very ill."

"But what is the matter?"

"Oh, these palpitations! they—they are dreadful! And I have a pain in my side."

"Would you like to see the doctor?"

"I don't know; perhaps it might be as well."

"Shall I send at once, then?"

"No, not at once. What do you think? Suppose you pour me out a little brandy and water; and I'll see how I am in the course of the day."

The woman did as she was desired; and when the drink had taken its effect, Kate declared she felt better. If it were not for the pain in her side and shoulder she'd be all right.

The landlady looked a little incredulous; but her lodger had only been with her a fortnight, and so carefully had the brandy been hidden, and the inebriety concealed, that although she had her doubts, she was not yet satisfied that Kate was an habitual drunkard. Certainly, the appearances were against Mrs. Lennox; but as regards the brandy bottle, she had watched it very carefully, and was convinced that scarcely more than sixpenny worth of liquor went out of it daily. The good woman did not know how it was replenished from another bottle that came sometimes from under the mattress, sometimes out of the chimney. And the disappearance of the husband was very satisfactorily accounted for by the announcement that he had gone to Manchester to produce a new piece. Besides, Mrs. Lennox was a very nice person, and it was a pleasure to attend to her, and during the course of the afternoon Mrs. White, the landlady, called several times at the second floor to inquire after her lodger's health.

But there was no change for the better. Looking the

picture of wretchedness, Kate lay back in her chair, declaring in low moans that she never felt so ill in her life—that the pain in her side was killing her. At first, Mrs. White seemed inclined to make light of all this complaining, but towards evening she began to grow alarmed, and strenuously urged that the doctor should be sent for.

"I assure you, ma'am," she said, "it is always better to see a doctor. The money is never thrown away; for even if there's nothing serious the matter, it eases one's mind to be told so."

Kate was generally easy to persuade, but fearing that her secret drinking would be discovered, she declined for a long time to take medical advice. At last, however, she was obliged to give away, and the die having been cast, she commenced to think how she might conceal part of the truth. Something of the coquetry of the actress returned to her, and, getting up from her chair, she went over to the glass to examine herself. She was horrified at the appearance she presented, and as she brushed back her hair, she said very sorrowfully:

"I am a complete wreck. I can't think what's the matter with me, and I have lost all my hair. You have no idea, Mrs. White, of the beautiful hair I used to have; it used to fall in armfuls over my shoulders; now, it is no more than a wisp."

"I think you have a great deal yet," returned Mrs. White, not wishing to discourage her.

"And how yellow I am, too!"

To this Mrs. White mumbled something that was inaudible, and Kate thought suddenly of her rouge-pot and hare's-foot. Her "make-up," and all her little souvenirs of Dick, lay securely packed away in an old band-box.

"Mrs. White," she said, "might I ask you to get me a jug of hot water?"

When the woman left the room, everything was spread hurriedly over the toilet-table. To see her, one would have thought that the call-boy had knocked at the door for the second time. A thin coating of cold cream was passed over the face and neck; then the powder-puff changed what was yellow into white, and the hare's-foot gave a sweet bloom

to the cheeks. The pencil was not necessary, her eyebrows being by nature dark and well-defined. Then all disappeared again into the band-box, a drain was taken out of the bottle whilst she listened to steps on the stairs, and she had just time to get back to her chair when the doctor entered. She felt quite prepared to receive him. Mrs. White, who had come up at the same time, looked uneasily around; and, after hesitating about the confines of the room, she put the water-jug on the rosewood cabinet, and said—

"I think I'll leave you alone with the doctor, ma'am; if you want me you'll ring."

Mr. Hooper was a short, stout man, with a large bald forehead, and long black hair; his small eyes were watchful as a ferret's, and his fat chubby hands were constantly laid on his knee-caps.

"I met Mrs. White's servant in the street," he said, looking at Kate as if he were trying to read through the rouge on her face, "so I came at once. Mrs. White, with whom I was speaking downstairs, tells me that you are suffering from a pain in your side."

"Yes, doctor, on the right side; and I have not been feeling very well lately."

"Is your appetite good? Will you let me feel your pulse?"

"No, I have scarcely any appetite at all—particularly in the morning. I can't touch anything for breakfast."

"Don't you care to drink anything? Aren't you thirsty?"

Kate would have liked to have told a lie, but fearing that she might endanger her life by doing so, she answered,

"Oh, yes! I am constantly very thirsty."

"Especially at night-time?"

It was irritating to have your life thus read; and Kate felt angry when she saw this dispassionate man watching the brandy-bottle, which she had forgotten to put away.

"Do you ever find it necessary to take any stimulant?"

Grasping at the word "necessary," she replied,

"Yes, doctor; my life isn't a very happy one, and I

often feel so low, so depressed as it were, that if I didn't take a little something to keep me up I think I should do away with myself."

"Your husband is an actor, I believe?"

"Yes; but he's at present up in Manchester, producing a new piece. I am on the stage, too. I have been playing a round of leading parts in the provinces, but since I have been in London I have been out of an engagement."

"I just asked you because I noticed you use a little powder, you know, on the face. Of course, I can't judge at present what your complexion is; but have you noticed any yellowness about the skin lately?"

The first instinct of a woman who drinks is to conceal her vice, and although she was talking to a doctor, Kate was again conscious of a feeling of resentment against the merciless eyes which saw through all the secrets of her life. But, cowed, as it were, by the certitude expressed by the doctor's looks and words, she strove to equivocate, and answered humbly that she had noticed that her skin was not looking as clear as it used to. Dr. Hooper then questioned her further. He asked if she suffered from a sense of uncomfortable tension, fulness, weight especially after meals; if she felt any pain in her right shoulder? and she had to confess that he was right in all his surmises.

"Do tell me, doctor, what is the matter with me? I would really, I assure you, much sooner know the worst."

But the doctor did not seem inclined to be communicative, and he merely mumbled, in reply to her question, something to the effect that the liver was out of order.

"I will send you over some medicine this evening," he said, "and if you do not feel better to-morrow send round for me, and do not attempt to get up. I think," he added, as he took up his hat to go, "I shall be able to put you all right. But you must follow my instructions; you must not frighten yourself, and take as little of that stimulant as you can help."

Kate answered that it was not her custom to take too much, and she tried to look surprised at the warning. She nevertheless derived a good deal of comfort from the

doctor's visit, and during the course of the evening succeeded in persuading herself that her fears of the morning were ill-founded, and, putting the medicine that was sent her away for the present, she helped herself liberally from a bottle that was drawn through a slit cut in the carpet. The fact of having a long letter to write to Dick to explain her conduct made it quite necessary that she should take something to keep her up, and sitting in her lonely room, she drank on steadily until midnight, until she could only just drag her clothes from her back and throw herself stupidly into bed. There she passed a fearsome night—a night full of livid-hued nightmares, sudden and lean horrors, from which she awoke shivering, and suffering form terrible palpitations of the heart. The silence of the house filled her with terrors, cold and obtuse as the dreams from which she had awakened. Strength to scream for help she had none; and thinking she was going to die, she sought for relief and consolation in the bottle that lay hidden under the carpet. When the drink took effect upon her she broke out into a profuse perspiration, and she managed to get a little sleep; but when her breakfast was brought up about eleven o'clock in the morning, so ill did she seem that the servant, fearing she was going to drop down dead, begged to be allowed to fetch the doctor. Rejecting, however, all offers of assistance, Kate lay moaning in an arm-chair, unable even to taste the cup of tea that the maid pressed upon her. She consented to take some of the medicines that had been ordered her, but whatever good they might have produced was negatived by the constant nip-drinking she kept up during the afternoon. The next day she was very ill indeed, and Mrs. White, greatly alarmed, insisted on sending for Dr. Hooper.

He did not seem astonished at the change in his patient. Calmly and quietly he watched for some moments in silence.

The bed had window-curtains of a red and antiquated material, and these contrasted with the paleness of the sheets wherein Kate lay, tossing feverishly. Most of the "make-up" had been rubbed away from her face; and

through patches of red and white the yellow skin started like blisters. She was slightly delirious, and when the doctor took her hand to feel her pulse, gazing at him with her big staring eyes, she spoke volubly and excitedly.

"Oh! I am so glad you have come, for I wanted to speak to you about my husband. I think I told you that he had gone to Manchester to produce a new piece. I don't know if I led you to suppose that he had deserted me, but if I did I was wrong to do so, for he has done nothing of the kind. It is true that we aren't very happy together, but I daresay that is my fault. I never was, I know, as good a wife to him as I had intended to be; but then he made me jealous and sometimes I was mad. Yes, I think I must have been mad to have spoken to him in the way I did. Anyhow, it doesn't matter now, does it, doctor? But I don't know what I am saying. Still, you won't mention that I have told you anything. It is as likely as not that he will forgive me, just as he did before; and we may yet be as happy as we were at Blackpool. You won't tell him, will you, doctor?"

"No, no, I will not," said Dr. Hooper, quietly and firmly. "But you mustn't talk as much as you do; if you want to see your husband, you must get well first."

"Oh, yes! I must get well; but tell me, doctor, how long will that take?"

"Not very long, if you will keep quiet and do what I tell you. I want you to tell me, how is the pain in your side?"

"Very bad; far worse than when I saw you last. I feel it now in my right shoulder as well."

"But your side—is it sore when you touch it? Will you let me feel?"

Without waiting for a reply, he passed his hand under the sheet.

"Is it there that it pains you?"

"Yes, yes. Oh! you are hurting me."

Then the doctor walked aside with the landlady, who had been watching the examination of the patient with anxious eyes. She said:

"Do you think it is anything very dangerous? Is it contagious? Had I better send her to the hospital?"

"No, I should scarcely think it worth while doing that; she will be well in a week, that is to say if she is properly looked after. She is suffering from acute congestion of the liver, brought on by——"

"By drink," said Mrs. White. "I suspected as much."

"You have too much to do, Mrs. White, with all your children, to give up your time to nursing her; I shall send someone round as soon as possible, but, in the meantime, will you see that her diet is regulated to half a cup of beef-tea every hour or so. If she complains of thirst, let her have some milk to drink, and you may mix a little brandy with it. To-night I shall send round a sleeping draught."

"You're sure, doctor, there is nothing catching, for you know, that with all my children in the house——"

"You need not be alarmed, Mrs. White."

"But do you think, doctor, it will be an expensive illness? for I know very little about her circumstances."

"I expect she'll be all right in a week or ten days, but what I fear for is her future. I've had a good deal of experience in such matters, and I have never known a case of a woman who cured herself of the vice of intemperance. A man sometimes, a woman never."

The landlady sighed and referred to all she had gone through during poor Mr. White's lifetime; the doctor spoke confidingly of a lady who was at present under his charge; and, apparently overcome with pity for suffering humanity, they descended the staircase together. On the doorstep the conversation was continued.

"Very well, then, doctor, I will take your advice; but at the end of a week or so, when she is quite recovered, I shall tell her that I have let her rooms. For, as you say, a woman rarely cures herself, and before the children the example would be dreadful."

"I expect to see her on her feet in about that time, then you can do as you please. I shall call to-morrow."

Next day the professional nurse took her place by the bedside. The sinapism which the doctor ordered was applied to the hepatic region, and a small dose of calomel was administered.

Under this treatment she improved rapidly; but unfortunately, as her health returned her taste for drink increased in a like proportion. Indeed, it was almost impossible to keep her from it, and on one occasion she tried very cunningly to outwit the nurse, who had fallen asleep in her chair. Waiting patiently until the woman's snoring had become sufficiently regular to warrant the possibility of a successful attempt being made on the brandy-bottle, Kate slipped noiselessly out of bed. Kate knew that all the bottles stood in a line upon the chest of drawers, but it was difficult to distinguish one from the other, and the jingling she made as she fumbled amid them awoke the nurse, who divining at once what was happening, arose quickly from her chair and advancing rapidly towards her, said:

"No, ma'am, I really can't allow it; it is against the doctor's orders."

"I'm not going to die of thirst to please any doctor. I was only going to take a little milk. I suppose there is no harm in that?"

"Not the least, ma'am, and if you had called me you should have had it."

It was owing to this fortuitous intervention, when Dr. Hooper called a couple of days after to see his patient, that he was able to certify to a remarkable change for the better in her. All the distressing symptoms had disappeared; the pain in the side had died away; the complexion was clearer. He therefore thought himself justified in ordering for her lunch a little fish and some weak brandy-and-water; and to Kate, who had not eaten any solid food for several days, this first meal took the importance of a very exceptional event. Sitting by her bedside Dr. Hooper spoke to her.

"Now, Mrs. Lennox," he said, "I want to give you a word of warning. I have seen you through what I must specify as a serious illness; dangerous I will not call it, although I might do so if I were to look into the future and anticipate the development the disease will most certainly take, unless, indeed, you will be guided by me, and make a vow against all intoxicating liquors."

At this direct allusion to her vice Kate stopped eating, and putting down the fork looked at the doctor.

"Now, Mrs. Lennox, you must not be angry," he continued in his kind way. "I am speaking to you in my capacity as a medical man, and I must warn you against the continuous nip drinking which, of course, I can see you are in the habit of indulging in, and which was the cause of the illness from which you are recovering. I will not harrow your feelings by referring to all the cases that have come under my notice where shame, disgrace, ruin, and death were the result of that one melancholy failing—drink."

"Oh, sir!" cried Kate, broken-hearted, "if you only knew how unhappy I have been, how miserable I am, you would not speak to me so. I have my failing it is true, but I am driven to it. I love my husband better than anything in the world, and I see him mixed up always with a lot of girls at the theatres, and it sends me mad, and then I go to drink so as to forget."

"We have all got our troubles; but it does not relieve us of the burden, it only makes us forget it for a short time, and then, when consciousness returns to us, we only remember it all the more bitterly. No, Mrs. Lennox, take my advice. In a few days, when you are well, go to your husband, demand his forgiveness, and resolve then never to touch spirits again."

"It is very good of you to speak to me in this way," said Kate, tearfully, "and I will take our advice. The very first day that I am strong enough to walk down to the Strand I will go and see my husband, and if he will give me another trial, he will not, I swear to you, have cause to repent it. Oh!" she continued, "you don't know how good he has been to me, how he has borne with me. If it hadn't been that he tried my temper by flirting with other women we might have been happy now."

Then, as Kate proceeded to speak of her trials and temptations, she grew more and more excited and hysterical, until the doctor, fearing that she would bring on a relapse, was forced to plead an engagement and wish her good-by.

As he left the room she cried after him, "The first day I am well enough to go out I will go and see my husband."

CHAPTER XXIX

THE next few days passed like dreams. Kate's soul, tense with the longing for reconciliation, floated at ease over the sordid miseries that lay within and without her, and enraptured with expectation, she lived in a beautiful paradise of hope.

So certain did she feel of being able to cross out, with firm erasure, the last few years of her life, that her mind was scarcely clouded by a doubt of the possibility of his declining to forgive her—that he might even refuse to see her. Charming the old days seemed to her, and looking back, perfect even she seemed then to have been. There her life appeared to have begun. She never thought of Hanley now. Ralph and Mrs. Ede were like dim shadows that had no concern in her existence. The potteries and the hills were as the recollections of childhood, dim and unimportant. The foot-lights and the applause of audiences were also dying echoes in her ears. Her life for the moment was concentrated in a loving memory of a Lancashire seashore and a rose-colored room, where she used to sit on the knees of the man she adored. The languors and the mental weaknesses of convalescence were conducive to this state of mental exaltation. She loved him better than anyone else could love him; she would never touch brandy again. He would take her back, and they would live as did the lovers in all the novels she had ever read. Like a scarf of white mist hanging around the face of a radiant morning, these allusions filled Kate's mind, and as she lay back amid the pillows, or sat dreaming by the fireside in the long evenings that were no longer lonely to her, she formed plans, and considered how she should plead to Dick in this much-desired interview. During this period dozens of letters were written and destroyed, and it was not until the time had arrived for her to go to the theatre to see him that she could decide upon what she could

write. Then hastily she scribbled a note, but her hand trembled so much that before she had said half what she intended the paper was covered with blotted and blurred lines.

"It will not do to let him think I am drunk again," she said to herself, as she threw aside what she had written and read over one of her previous efforts. It ran as follows:—

"My Darling Dick,

"You will, I am sure, be sorry to hear that I have been very ill. I am now, however, much better; indeed, I may say quite recovered. During my illness I have been thinking over our quarrels, and I now see how badly, how wickedly, I have behaved to you on many occasions. I do not know, and I scarcely dare to hope that you will ever forgive me, but I trust that you will not refuse to see me for a few minutes. I have, I assure you, not tasted spirits for some weeks, so you need not fear I will kick up a row. I will promise to be very quiet. I will not reproach you, nor get excited, nor raise my voice. I shall be very good, and will not detain you but for a very short time. You will not, you cannot, oh, my darling! deny me this one little request—to see you again, although only for a few minutes.

"Your affectionate wife,

"Kate."

Compared with the fervid thoughts of her brain, these words appeared to her weak and poor, but feeling that for the moment, at least, she could not add to their intensity, she set out on her walk, hoping to find her husband at the theatre.

It was about eight o'clock in the evening. A light, gray fog hung over the background of the streets, and the line of the housetops was almost lost in the morose shadows that fell from a pale soot-colored sky. Here and there a chimney-stack or the sharp spire of a church tore the muslin-like curtains of descending mist; below the streets twisted, wriggling their luminous way through slime and gloom, whilst at every turning the broad, flaring windows of the public-houses marked the English highway. But Kate paid no attention to the red-lettered temptations. Docile and hopeful as a tired animal thinking of its stable, she walked through the dark crowd that pressed upon her, nor did she even notice when she was jostled, but went on,

a heedless nondescript—a something in a black shawl and a quasi-respectable bonnet, a slippery stepping-stone between the low women who whispered and the workwoman who hurried home with the tin of evening beer in her hand. Like one held and guided by the power of a dream, she lost consciousness of all that was not of it. Vague as the mist, thoughts of how Dick would receive her and forgive her were folded, entangled, and broken within narrow limits of time; half an hour passed like a minute, and she found herself at the stage-door of the theatre. Drawing her letter from her pocket, she said to the hall-keeper:

"Will you kindly give Mr. Lennox this letter? Has he arrived yet?"

"Yes, but he's very busy for the moment. But," the man added, as he examined Kate's features narrowly, "you'll excuse me, I made a mistake; Mr. Lennox isn't in the theatre."

Her heart sank within her. Would she not be able to get to see her husband, even for a few minutes? At that moment the swinging door was thrust open, and the call-boy screamed—

"Mr. Lennox says you are not to let Miss Thomas pass to-night, and if there are any letters for him I am to take them in."

"Here is one; will you give it to Mr. Lennox?" said Kate, eagerly thrusting forward her note. "Say that I am waiting for an answer."

The stage-door keeper tried to interpose, but before he could explain himself the boy had rushed away.

"All letters should be given to me," he growled as he turned away to argue with Miss Thomas, who had just arrived. In a few minutes the call-boy came back.

"Will you please step this way," he said to Kate.

"No you sha'n't," cried the hallkeeper; "if you try any nonsense with me I shall send round for a policeman."

Kate started back frightened, thinking these words were addressed to her, but a glance showed her that she was mistaken.

"Oh! how dare you talk to me like that? You are an unsophisticated beast!" cried Miss Thomas.

"Pass under my arm, ma'am," said the hallkeeper. "I don't want this one to get through." And amid a storm of violent words and the strains of distant music Kate went up a narrow staircase that creaked under the weight of a group of girls in strange dresses. When she got past them she saw Dick at the door of his room waiting for her. The table was covered with letters, the walls with bills announcing "a great success."

He took her hand very kindly, and placed her in a chair. She looked at him, disappointed that he did not kiss her. It seemed doubtful at first who would break an awkward and irritating silence. At last Dick said:

"I am sorry to hear, Kate, that you have been ill; but you are looking better now."

"Yes, I'm better now," she replied drearily; "but perhaps if I had died it would have been as well, for you can never love me again."

Dick seemed embarrassed by the question. He hesitated, and sought for words. It was distinctly against his nature to confess to any woman that he did not love her, and he did not see his way for the moment to making an exception even in the case of his wife.

"You know, my dear," he said, equivocating, "that we did not get on well together."

Mistaken for signs of a possible forgiveness the want of moral courage which prevented him from telling her manfully that nothing in heaven or earth would ever persuade him to sleep under the seame roof with her again, Kate at once melted to tenderness. The instincts of the actress seemed to awaken in her, and she said, with tears in her voice:

"Oh, Dick! I know it. You were very good to me, and I made your life wretched on account of my jealousy, but I couldn't help it, for I loved you better than a woman ever loved a man. I cannot tell you, I cannot find words to express how much I love you. You are to me everything. I lived for your love; I am dying of it. Yes, Dick, I am dying for love of you; I feel it here; it devours me like a fire, and what is so strange is, that nothing seems real to me except you. I never think of anything but of things

that concern you. Anything that ever belonged to you I treasure up as a relic. You know the chaplet of pearls I used to wear when we played *The Lover's Knot.* Well, I have them still, although all else has gone from me. The string was broken once or twice, and some of the pearls were lost, but I threaded them again, and it still goes round my neck. I was looking at them the other day, and it made me very sad, for it made me think of the happy days—ah, the very happy days!—we have had together before I took to—. But I won't speak of that. I have cured myself. Yes, I assure you, Dick, I have cured myself; and it is for that I have come to talk to you. Were I not sure that I would never touch brandy again I would not ask you to take me back, for I would sooner die than do what I have done, but I know that I never will. Can you—will you—my own darling, Dick, give me another trial?"

The intensity of her emotion gave new life to the words that were often but memories of half-forgotten stage-plays, and it was evident that Dick was fighting a hard fight against his feelings, and was determined to do all he could not to give way. From past experience, he knew well that Kate's reformation was only a thing of to-day to-morrow, or next day—that, sooner or later, she was bound to fall back into her old ways, and that then would be re-enacted all the horrible scenes that he had gone through, and that he now hoped he had done with forever. Dick looked at Kate, troubled in his very entrails. The victory hung in the balance, but at that moment a superb girl, in all the splendor of long green tights, and resplendent with breastplate and spear, flung open the door.

"Look here, Dick," she began, but seeing Kate, she stopped short, and stammered out an apology.

"I shall be down on the stage in a minute, dear," he said, rising from his chair. The door was shut, and they were again alone; but Kate felt that chance had gone against her. The interruption had, with a sudden shock, killed the emotions she had succeeded in awakening, and had supplied Dick with an answer that would lead him, by a way after his own heart, straight out of his difficulty.

"My dear," he said, rising from his chair, "I am awfully glad you have given up the—you know what—for between you and me, that was the cause of all our trouble; but, candidly speaking, I do not think it would be advisable for us to live together, at least for the present, and I'll tell you why. I know that you love me very much, but, as you said yourself just now, it is your jealousy and the drink together that excites you, and leads up to those terrible rows. Now, the best plan would be for us to live apart, let us say for six months or so, until you have entirely got over your little weakness, you know; and then—why, then we'll be as happy as we used to be at Blackpool in the dear old times long ago."

"Oh, Dick! don't say that I must wait six months; I might be dead before then. But you are not speaking the truth to me. You were just going to say that I might come back to you when the horrid girl came in. I know. Yes, I believe there is something between you."

"Now, Kate, remember your promise not to kick up a row. I consented to see you because you said you would not be violent. Here is your letter."

"I am not going to be violent, Dick; but six months seems such a long time."

"It won't be as long passing as you think. And now I must run away; they are waiting for me on the stage. Have you seen the piece? Would you like to go in front?"

"No, not to-night, Dick; I feel too sad. But won't you kiss me before I go?"

Dick bent his face and kissed her; but there was a chill in the kiss that went to her heart, and she felt that his lips would never touch hers again. But she had no protest to make, and almost in silence she allowed herself to be shown out of the theatre. When she got into the mist she shivered a little, and drew her thin shawl tighter about her thin shoulders, and, with one of the choruses still ringing in her ears, she walked in the direction of the Strand. Somehow her sorrow did not seem too great for her to bear. The interview had passed neither as badly nor as well as had been expected, and thinking of the six months of probation that lay before her, without, however, being in the

least able to realize their meaning, she walked dreaming through the sloppy, fog-smelling streets. The lamps were now but like furred patches of yellow laid on a dead gray background, and a mud-bespattered crowd rolled in and out of the darkness. The roofs overhead were completely engulfed in the soot-colored sky that seemed to be descending on the heads of the passengers. Men passed carrying parcels; the white necktie of a theatre-goer was caught sight of; but prostitution had for the moment monopolized the town. From Lambeth, from Islington, from Pimlico, from all the dark corners where it had been lurking in the daytime, at the fading of the light it had descended ravenous and awful as a horde of wolves. Portly matrons, respectable-looking in brown silk dresses and veils, stood in the corners of alleys and dingy courts; young girls of fifteen and sixteen, their dyed hair hanging about their shoulders like wisps of dirty straw, and their faces bespeaking generations of drunkenness in the by-streets of Drury Lane, went by in couples—the elder undertaking the responsibility of choosing. There was also much trafficking in foreign tongues, Germans in long ulsters being the most assiduous; policemen on their beats would not have looked less concerned with amusement. The English hung round the public-houses, enviously watching the arched insteps of the French women, that alone tripped spotless through the dreadful dirt. Smiles there were plenty, but they were hard and mechanical; even the Parisians had lost their native levity, and could do no more than wink like cynical dolls. It was sordid vice, black, evil-smelling as the mud underfoot, remorseless as the sky overhead.

Down Wellington Street the sickly flaring of the electric light announced where the river flowed, and the white spire of St. Mary's had disappeared in the thickening gloom. Without seeing them, Kate examined the passers-by—the men that hurried home, woollen comforters twisted round their throats, the white-bearded one who walked slyly away with their petticoat, the youths who gazed vacantly after every ankle. It astonished her to find the world so busy; she would have changed her identity with the meanest, and she

went on heedlessly, until she stumbled against a small man who leaned against a doorway, coughing violently.

They stared at each other in profound astonishment, and then Kate said in a pained and broken voice:

"Oh, Ralph! is it you?"

"Yes, indeed it is. But to think of meeting you here in London!"

They had, for the second, in a sort of way, forgotten that they had once been man and wife, and after a pause Kate said—

"But that's just what I was thinking. What are you doing in London?"

Ralph was about to answer when he was cut short by a fit of coughing. His head sank into his chest, and his little body was shaken until it seemed as if it were going to break to pieces like a bundle of sticks. Kate looked at him pityingly, and said, passing unconsciously over the dividing years, just as she might have done when they kept shop together in Hanley:

"Oh! you know you shouldn't stop out in such weather as this; you will be breathless to-morrow."

"Oh, no, I sha'n't; I've got a new remedy. But I have lost my way; that's the reason why I am so late."

"Perhaps I can tell you. Where are you staying?"

"In an hotel in Bedford Street, near Covent Garden."

"Well, then, this is your way; you have come too far."

And passing again into the jostling crowd they walked on in silence side by side. A slanting cloud of fog had drifted from the river down into the street, creating a shivering and terrifying darkness. The cabs moved at walking pace, the huge omnibuses stopped belated, and their advertisements could not be read even when a block occurred close under a gas-lamp. The jewellers' windows emitted the most light; but even gold and silver wares seemed to have become tarnished in the sickening atmosphere. Then the smell from fishmongers' shops grew sourer as the assistant piled up the lobsters and flooded the marbles preparatory to closing; and, just within the circle of vision, inhaling the greasy fragance of soup, a woman in a blue bonnet loitered near a grating.

"This is Bedford Street, I think," said Kate, "but it is so dark that it is impossible to see."

"I suppose you know London well?" replied Ralph somewhat pointedly.

"Pretty well, I have been here now for some time."

For the last three or four minutes not a word had been spoken. Kate was surprised that Ralph was not angry with her; she wanted to speak to him of old times; but it was hard to break the ice of intervening years. At last, as they stopped before the door of a small family hotel, he said—

"It is now something like four years since we parted, ain't it?"

The question startled her, and she answered nervously and hurriedly—

"I suppose it is, but I had better wish you good-by now —you are safe at home."

"Oh no! come in; you look so very tired, a glass of wine will do you good. Besides, what harm? Wasn't I your husband once?"

"Oh, Ralph! how can you?"

"Why, there is no reason why I shouldn't hear how you have been getting on. We are just like strangers, so many things have occurred, I have married since—but perhaps you did not hear of it?"

"Married! Who did you marry?"

"Well! I married your assistant, Miss Hender."

"What, Miss Hender your wife?" said Kate, with an intonation of voice that was full of pain. A dagger thrust suddenly through her side as she went up the staircase could not have wounded her more cruelly than the news that the woman who had been her assistant now owned the house that had once been hers, and was now the wife of the man who had been her husband. The story of the dog in the manger is as eternal as the world.

Through the windows of the little public sitting-room nothing was visible; everything was shrouded in the yellow curtain of fog. A commercial traveller had drawn off his boots, and was warming his slippered feet by the fire.

"Dreadful weather, sir," said the man. "I'm afraid

it won't do your cough much good. Will you come near the fire?"

"Thank you," said Ralph.

Mechanically Kate drew forward a chair. It would be impossible for them to say a word, for the traveller was evidently inclined to be garrulous. Both wondered what were best to do, but at that moment the chambermaid came to announce that the gentleman's room was ready. He retired, carrying his boots with him, and they, who had once been husband and wife, were left alone, and yet it seemed as difficult as ever to speak of what was uppermost in their minds. Kate helped Ralph off with his great-coat, and she noticed that he looked thinner and paler. The servant brought up two glasses of grog, and when Kate had taken off her bonnet, she said—

"Do you think I am much altered?"

"Well, since you ask me, Kate, I must say I don't think you are looking very well. You are thinner than you used to be, and you have lost a good deal of your hair."

"I have only just recovered from a bad illness," she said sighing, and as she raised the glass to her lips the gaslight defined the whole contour of her head. The thick hair that used to encircle her pale prominent temples like rich velvet looked now like a black silk band frayed and whitened at the seam.

"But what have you been doing? Have things gone pretty well with you?" said Ralph, whose breath came from him in a thin but continuous whistle. "What happened when I got my decree of divorce?"

"Nothing particular for a while, but afterwards we were married."

"Oh!" said Ralph, "so he married you, did he? Well, I shouldn't have expected it of him. So we are both married. Isn't it odd? and meeting, too, in this way."

"Yes, many things have happened since then. I have been on the stage—travelling all over England."

"What! you on the stage, Kate?" said Ralph, lifting his head from his hand. "Oh lord! oh lord! how—Ha! ha! Oh! but I musn't la—ugh; I shall not be able to breathe."

Kate turned to him almost angrily, and the ghost of the prima donna awakening in her, she said—

"I don't see what there is to laugh at. I have played all the leading parts, and in all the principal towns in England—Liverpool, Manchester, Leeds. The *Newcastle Chronicle* said my Serpolette was the best they had seen."

Ralph looked bewildered, like a man blinded for a moment by a sudden flash of lightning. He could not at once realize that this woman, who had been his wife, who had washed and scrubbed in his little home in Hanley, was now one of those luminous women who, in clear skirts and pink stockings, wander, singing beautiful songs, amid illimitable forests and unscalable mountains. For a moment he regretted he had married Miss Hender.

"But I don't think I shall ever act again."

"How is that?" he said with an intonation of disappointment in his voice.

"I don't know," said Kate. "I am not living with my husband now, and I haven't the courage to look out for an engagment myself."

Ralph stared at her vaguely. "Look out for an engagement?" he repeated to himself, it seemed to him that he must be dreaming.

"Are you not happy with him? Does he not treat you well?" said Ralph, dropping perforce from his dream back into reality.

"Oh yes, he has always been very good to me. I can't say how it was, but somehow after a time we did not get on. I daresay it was my fault. But how do you get on with Miss Hender?" said Kate, partly from curiosity, half from a wish to change the conversation.

"Oh, pretty well," said Ralph, with something that sounded, in spite of his wheezing, like a sigh.

"How does she manage the dressmaking? She was always a good workwoman, but she never had much taste, and I should fancy would not be able to do much if left entirely to herself."

"That's just what occurred. It's curious you should have guessed so correctly. The business has all gone to the

dogs, and since mother's death we have turned the house into a lodging-house."

"And is mother dead?" cried Kate, clasping her hands. "What must she have thought of me!"

Ralph did not answer, but after a long silence he said—

"It's a pity, ain't it, that we did not pull it off better together?"

Kate raised her head and looked at him quickly. Her look was full of gratitude.

"Yes," she said, "I behaved very badly towards you, but I believe I have been punished for it."

"You told me that he married you and treated you very well."

"Oh!" she said, bursting into tears, "don't ask me, it is too long a story; I will tell you another time, but not now."

It appeared to Kate that her heart was on fire and that she must die of grief. "Was this life?" she asked herself. Oh, to be at rest and out of the way forever! Ralph, too, seemed deeply affected; after a pause he said:

"I don't know how it was, or why, but now I come to think of it I remember that I used to be cross with you—too cross with you, but it was the horrible asthma."

Kate's Bohemianism rushed away as water flows out of sight, when a sluice is suddenly raised, and she became again the middle-class working woman, ever thinking of, ever willing to work in the interests of her home.

"There were faults on both sides," he continued, "and I don't exempt mother from blame either. She was always too hard upon you. Now I should never have minded your going to the theatre and amusing yourself. I should not have minded your being an actress, and I should have gone to fetch you home every evening."

Kate smiled through her misery, and he continued, following his idea to the end.

"It wouldn't have interfered with the business if you had been; on the contrary, it would have brought us a connection, and I might have had up those plate-glass windows, and taken in the fruiterer's shop."

Ralph stopped. The roar of London had sunk out of

hearing in the yellow depths of the fog, and for some minutes nothing was heard but the short ticking of the clock. It was a melancholy pleasure to dream what might have been had things only taken a different turn, and like children making mud pies it amused them to rebuild the little fabric of their lives: whilst one reconstructed his vision of broken glass, the other lamented over the ruins of penny journal sentiment. Then awakening by fits and starts, each confided in the other. Ralph told Kate how Mrs. Ede had spoken of her when her flight had been discovered; Kate tried to explain that she was not as much to blame as might be imagined. Constantly Ralph's curiosity got the better of him, and he could not but ask her to tell him something about her stage experience. One thing led to another, and before twelve o'clock it surprised her to think she had told him so much. The conversation was carried on in brief and broken phrases. Shivering, the man and the woman sat close together, leaning over the fire. There were no curtains to the windows, and the fog had crept through the sashes into the room. Kate coughed from time to time—a sharp, hacking cough—and Ralph's wheezing grew thicker in sound.

"I'm a—fraid I shall have a b—bad night, this dre—adful weather."

"I should like to stop to nurse you; but I must be getting home."

"You surely won't think of going out such a night as this; you never will find your way home."

"Yes, yes, I shall; it wouldn't do for me to remain here."

They who had once been husband and wife looked at each other, and both smiled painfully.

"Ve-ry well, I'll see you do—wnstairs."

"Oh, no! you mustn't, you'll kill yourself!"

Ralph, however, insisted. They stood on the doorstep for a moment together, suffocating in a sulphur-hued atmosphere.

"You'll come a—nd see me again to—to-morrow, won't you?"

"Yes, yes!" cried Kate; "to-morrow! to-morrow!" and she disappeared in the darkness.

CHAPTER XXX

FATE, however, had not destined that they should ever see each other again. After her over-exertion and over-excitement Kate found herself next day unable to leave her room; completely exhausted she lay in bed. She had no one to whose care she could entrust a letter, and when towards the end of the week she went again to Bedford Street, she found Ralph was gone, and what was worse, without having left any message for her. He, upon consideration, had come to the conclusion that this sentimentalizing over old times could not be productive of much good. He was sorry that Kate was not happy with her husband, but was not her life of her own making, Had she not behaved very badly? and had not chance favored her? Why, the man married her! What more could he do? And he, Ralph, was married too, so he and she were as widely separated as if the Atlantic were between them. Go back they could not, and looking back was useless and sad. If they did meet again all they could do would be to rake up a lot of old memories. He could not help her; sooner or later they would have to part, and if Mrs. Ede heard of their meeting she would kick up an awful row. She would hit him, knock him all over the place, which was very cruel of her; for, when he had his asthma, he was totally unable to defend himself.

Influenced by these excellent reasons, Ralph congratulated himself when Kate did not keep her appointment, and, as soon as his business allowed him, he hurried out of London, more anxious to be back in Hanley than he could have imagined himself to be. He had thought, it is true, of writing a note to explain his sudden departure, but fearing to compromise himself, "to give her a hold over him," he had gone without a word; and when this was explained by the parlormaid to Kate, sadly she left the doorstep to return to her dreary home. She did not cry;

tears were dry within her; she had suffered so much that further misfortunes could only fall upon her like blows upon a jaded animal. She was now heedless of whatever might befall her. Every fibre of moral courage, of self-respect, was broken through, all ties were destroyed. She was alone, and could do nothing but abandon herself to the current of vice and misery that was bearing her away. Even the memory of the six months of probation she had agreed to was lost sight of in the disappointment of not seeing Ralph, and before three days her loneliness had again driven her to drink. After this relapse the stages through which she sank in degradation were as rapid as they were horrible. The two pounds a week allowed her by her husband sufficed in a sort of way for her daily wants. For the sum of six or seven shillings she got a room "good enough for her;" not two shillings a day was spent in food, the rest went, wasted in public-houses. Friends, even acquaintances, had disowned her, and for the sake of hearing a human voice she was soon reduced to treating the low women—charwomen and worse—whom she met at the corners of the streets. In discolored sheets she would remain all the morning, either dozing or tossing feverishly; then she would try to force herself to taste a cup of tea, but generally she could touch nothing, and it was not until she had been out for what she called a walk—a long night prowl through dingy and dirty back streets—that she began to feel better, and in a coffee-shop would stop to have something to eat. After this meal she would sometimes descend into the Strand, and walking up and down amid the unfortunates, wait for hours in the hope of meeting Dick as he was returning from the theatre. In these searches she was not successful; for having once caught sight of her he ever afterwards returned home by the Embankment. Nevertheless, she did not give up hope, and over glasses of whiskey explaining her troubles to the women—to whom she was known as Sentimental Kate—she would loiter about the "private entrances" until one o'clock in the morning. By that time she was well on in liquor, and singing incoherently, she returned home staggering. One night, however, she fell into the hands of the

police, and passed a night at the station. It being a first offense she was let off with a small fine and a caution that she must behave herself better for the future. But she was now too hopelessly lost to be stayed in her downward career by even this disgrace. Drink had degraded her to the utmost; she had been dragged down until there was between her and the lowest depths but one step. Even that she was obliged to take. Hitherto she had remained virtuous—her love of her husband burned like a pure white flame in the dark night of ignominy in which she lived and although in constant relationship with the vilest, she had never dreamed it possible that she could stain herself with their stain. But one morning, after a night of debauch, she woke up stricken with doubt, driven wild with an agonizing uncertainty of something half forgotten. All she could remember was that she had been talking, about midnight, to some women near Charing Cross, and that a man had taken her to have a drink. She could recollect nothing more, and now her chaplet of pearls lay scattered about the floor, broken. It seemed to her like an omen, and so many had now been lost that she could no longer wear it round her neck. She wept bitterly for a time, but her brain was capable of retaining neither ideas nor sentiment; thought slipped from her like water through a sieve. As her mind became weakened her capacity for drink increased. Everything, even her violent temper, seemed to have left her; she gradually became like a worn-out machine, from which all rivets and screws had fallen, and miserable as a homeless dog, she rolled from one lodging to another;—after a few days driven forth from the lowest for dirt and dissoluteness. Under the pressure of such excesses her disease increased daily, and to keep pace with her exhaustion she was forced to take increased doses of stimulants. But the end was now rapidly approaching, and the next important event in her life was when she found herself unable to leave her bed. She did not ring, and it was not until evening that her landlady found time to come upstairs to see what the matter was. When she entered the room she started at the ghastly spectre before her.

Had she known in the first instance that the woman to whom she was letting her top-floor-back was in such a bad state of health, she probably would have refused to take in; but once having admitted her into possession it was difficult to turn her out; and, having satisfied herself that Kate was in receipt of a weekly income of two pounds, she made up her mind for the worst, and accorded such attention as would, in the event of death, qualify her for receiving compensation from the husband for the trouble and annoyance she had been put to. She might have been kinder; as it was, she merely did her duty. The beef-tea she sometimes brought up with her own hands, and when she had time she sat by the bedside and advised Kate to see a doctor. This the patient refused to do, it was impossible to persuade her, and three weeks passed, weeks filled with silence, moans, and the livid shadow of death. Nothing now remained on her stomach; nausea and continuous vomiting making her life a hell, until at last it became clear even to the landlady, that she could no longer accept the responsibility; and, having made the necessary inquiries, she hurried to the Opera Comique. When the woman was shown in Dick was engaged in deciding a delicate question relating to the skirts to be worn in the second act of the new piece, but when it was explained to him that his wife was dying he begged of the costumier to excuse him. Yet, notwithstanding all that could be said, he could not be induced to go and see Kate. Out of sight out of mind. To appeal to this man's imagination was vain; what he could not see he could not feel, and it was quite out of his power to understand that his presence could relieve or assuage. If he were a doctor he'd go at once, was the answer he made to the woman's supplications; as it was it would only distress him and excite the sufferer. He had endured too much, and had now neither affection nor pity for giving. He offered merely a passive resistance; and when Mrs. Forest, interrupting the conversation, said, that as she had already met Kate in a previous life and should see her again some centuries hence, it was only just that she should start off at once to nurse her, he attempted no opposition. Indeed,

he seemed quite satisfied with the arrangement, merely mentioning, as a parting word of advice, that the second act would be put into rehearsal at the beginning of the following week.

Henceforth Mrs. Forest's place was by Kate's bedside, and, all the while committing her absurd lucubrations to paper—"Sayings of the Sybil," by Alta Una, for the general use of mankind, and choruses of policemen and nuns for the particular benefit of Dick—she strove to unite the discrepant offices of nurse and librettist. By a strange coincidence, the doctor who attended was Mr. Hooper. He at once recognized his patient, but a glance now sufficed to convince him that she was doomed—that no power could save her. Perhaps, had he seen that there was still any chance of even averting for a time the certainty of death, he would have insisted on Mrs. Forest's resigning her post as nurse. But nothing could now be done. He questioned her regarding the sufferer—asked her what she knew of her history, and by whose authority she was watching by the bedside. The answers he received were vague in the extreme, and they consisted mostly of quotations from the "Sayings." "I have lived eight times on earth, witnessed the dread contest of death, and died for the cause of Pan, and the Light-king, and Eros the immortal, whose I am; and once again, for the ninth time, I live and watch the contest—watch with joy which overcomes fear, with love that conquers death." The contrast between this strange creature and the quivering mass of flesh on the bed was as awful as it was extraordinary. But as matters stood it made little difference who was there; and, having assured himself that the woman was sane enough to attend to his directions, he took up his hat to go. Rustling her voluminous silk, Mrs. Forest curtsied him out. "Nothing," she said, "can be well worse than the present state of earth-life in all its phases, and if the human race is to be evolved into a higher degree of perfection no weak half measures will avail to effect the change; there must, on the contrary, be a radical change in hereditary environment."

The doctor listened a moment as if stupefied. With-

out answering, he descended the staircase. As if enchanted with the impression she had produced, Mrs. Forest went back to her writing-table, and settling the folds of her brown silk widely over the floor, she commenced to write, according to certain indications in pencil at the top of the paper, a chorus of policemen:—

> "We are bobbies, bobbies fat and merry,
> And we love our buxom Mary Janes;
> Pickles, mutton, ale, and likewise perry,
> Help us, heal us of our earthly pains."

At this point the inspiration seemed to desert her, and raising her pen from the paper, she bit its end thoughtfully, seeking for a transitional phrase whereby she might be able to allude to the Light-god.

They were in a six-shillings-a-week bedroom in the neighborhood of the Strand. The window looked on a bit of red-tiled roofing, a cistern, and a clothes-line, on which a petticoat and an apron generally flapped. Facing the light, close up against the wall, her stomach enormously distended by dropsy, Kate lay delirous. From time to time her arms, wasted now to mere bones, were waved. She had been for three whole days insensible, speaking in broken phrases of her past life—of Mrs. Ede, the potteries, the two little girls, Annie and Lizzie. Dick, she declared, had been very good to her. Ralph, too, had been kind, and she was determined that the two men should not quarrel for her. They must not kill each other; she would not allow it; they should be friends. They would be all friends yet; that is to say, if Mrs. Ede would permit of it; and why should she stand between people and make enemies of them? Then her ideas would grow still more confused, until she imagined that it was for the part of the Baillie that Dick and Ralph were quarrelling, and, apostrophizing Mrs. Ede, she would express her regret that there was nothing in the piece for her. Memories, too, of the baby-girl who had died in Manchester were not wanting, and, fancying that Ralph had come to rob her of it, and making every effort to get out of bed, in Mrs. Forest's arms she would supplicate and pray of him to believe that it was

not his but Dick's child. It required, however, very little power to restrain her, and in a few moments, on the verge of suffocation, Mrs. Forest would lay her back on the pillow. Apparently the mad woman saw nothing incongruous in her conduct, and with an undisturbed mind she went back to the chorus of policemen, which would be required at the theatre in a few days. The landlady had given her a small table to write on, but now, when Mrs. Forest arose to attend the patient, she could scarcely pass between it and the basin-stand. About the bedside were nailed a few pieces of ragged carpet, but the boards in many places were uncovered, and dust lay in heaps in every corner. A sour, acid smell proceeded from the basin and poisoned the atmosphere. Mrs. Forest did not seem to notice this. Fevered, impassioned by a sudden idea concerning the Light-god, her pen went scratching over the paper, nor did she perceive that Kate had recovered consciousness and was looking at her interrogatively. "Give me something to drink; I am dying of thirst," the sick woman murmured faintly.

Mrs. Forest started from her reveries, and going over to the fire-place, where the beef-tea was standing, poured out half a cup; but, owing to great difficulty in breathing, it was some time before the patient could drink it. She was now a dreadful thing to look upon. Her thin hair hung like a wisp, and she had lost so much that the prominent temples were large with a partial baldness. The rich olive complexion was now changed to a dirty yellow, around the nose and mouth the skin was pinched and puckered—it looked, indeed, more like yellow blotting-paper than skin. The appearance of the face was one of deep and painful distress; the eyes were glazed but filled with eager searching, the lids drooped, and so bad was the breath that Mrs. Forest, when she approached the bed, had to stand with averted head. After a long silence Kate said—

"I have been very ill, have I not? I think I must be dying."

"Death is not death," answered Mrs. Forest, "when we die for Pan, the undying representative of the universe cognizable to the senses."

Kate made no reply. Over her mind lay a vague dream, through whose gloom two things were just perceptible—an idea of death and a desire to see Dick. But she was almost too weak to seek for words, and it was with great effort that she said—

"I do not remember who you are; I can think of nothing now, but I should like to see my husband once more. Could you fetch him? Is he here?"

At this mention of Dick Mrs. Forest leered with the eye that was not made of glass, and, moved by some sort of grotesque jealousy, she said—

"You have not been happy with him I know, my sister; but I do not blame you. Your marriage was not a psychological union; that is the only marriage, and without it Woman cannot set her foot on the lowest step of the temple of Eros."

"I am too ill to talk with you," said the dying woman; "but I loved my husband well—oh, very well indeed. In that box I keep all my little remembrances of him; they are not much—not much—but I should like him to have them when I am gone, so that he may know that I loved him to the last. Perhaps then he might forgive me."

While talking of Eros the immortal, Mrs. Forest held the box under Kate's eyes. She looked at the packet of old letters, kissed the crumpled calico rose, the button she had pulled off his coat in a drunken fit and preserved for love, and she even slipped on her wrist the few pearls that remained of the chaplet she wore when they played at sweethearts in the *Lovers' Knot*. But when the souvenirs had been put back in the box, and Kate had again asked Mrs. Forest to bring Dick to her, she began to ramble in her speech, and to fancy herself in Hanley; and as the mad woman's thoughts discovered analogies between London policemen and Pan, the Light-god and undying representative of the universe, her pen kept up a scratching accompaniment to the equally unintelligible ravings that proceeded from the bed. Scenes the most diverse were heaped together in the complex confusion of a nightmare, ideas the most opposed were intermingled. At one moment she told the little girls, Annie and Lizzie, of the immorality

of the conversations in the dressing-rooms of theatres; at another she stopped the rehearsal of an opera bouffe to preach to the mummers—in phrases that were remembrances of the extemporaneous prayers in the Wesleyan church—of the advantages of an earnest, working, religious life. It was like a costume ball, where chastity grinned from behind a mask that vice was looking for, while vice hid his nakedness in some of the robes that chastity had let fall. Thus up and down, like dice thrown by demon players, were rattled the two lives, the double life that this weak woman had so miserably lived through. But a final blending had to be reached, a point where the two became one, and this was touched when she commenced to sing her famous song,

"Look at me here, look at me there,"

alternately with the Wesleyan hymns. Sometimes in her delirium, she even fitted the words of one on to the tune of the other.

Still, Mrs. Forest took no notice. In terrible cadence her pen went scratch, scratch, until she had finished her chorus of policemen. Then she turned to her pamphlet, entitled "Sayings of a Sybil," and as she was inditing some remarks anent super-socialistic government, it occured to her that although Dick's marriage had not been a psychological one, it might be as well that he should see his wife before she died. Having come to this conclusion she suddenly put on her bonnet and left the house. An hour passed, two hours passed, and the landlady brought in the lamp. She placed in on the table, out of sight of the dying woman's eyes, but she did not stop to watch by the bedside: Kate was too fearful a thing to look upon.

A dreadful paleness had changed even the yellow of her face to an ashen tint; her lips had disappeared, her eyes were dilated, and she tried to raise herself up in bed. Her withered arms were waved to and fro, and in the red gloom shed from the ill-smelling paraffin lamp the large, dimly-seen folds of the bed-clothes were tossed to and fro by the

convulsions that agitated the whole body. Another hour passed away, marked, not by the mechanical ticking of a clock, but by the cavernous breathing of the woman as she crept to the edge of death. At last there came a sigh, deeper and more prolonged, and with it she died.

Soon after, before the corpse had grown cold, heavy steps were heard on the staircase, and Dick and Mrs. Forest entered, one with a quantity of cockatoo-like flutterings, the other steadily, like a big and ponderous animal. At a glance they saw that all was over, and in silence they sat down, their hands resting on the table. In awkward phrases the man spoke hesitatingly of a happy release; the woman listened and leered, and, ill at ease, glancing occasionally at the huge body beneath the bed-clothes, they both sought vainly for edifying thoughts and words of consolation. She would have liked to have said something concerning psychological marriages; he wished to say something nice and kind, but her presence put everything out of his head, and so his ideas became more than ever broken and disjointed, his thoughts wandered, until at last, lifting his eyes from the MS. on the table, he said—

"Have you finished the second act, dear?"

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